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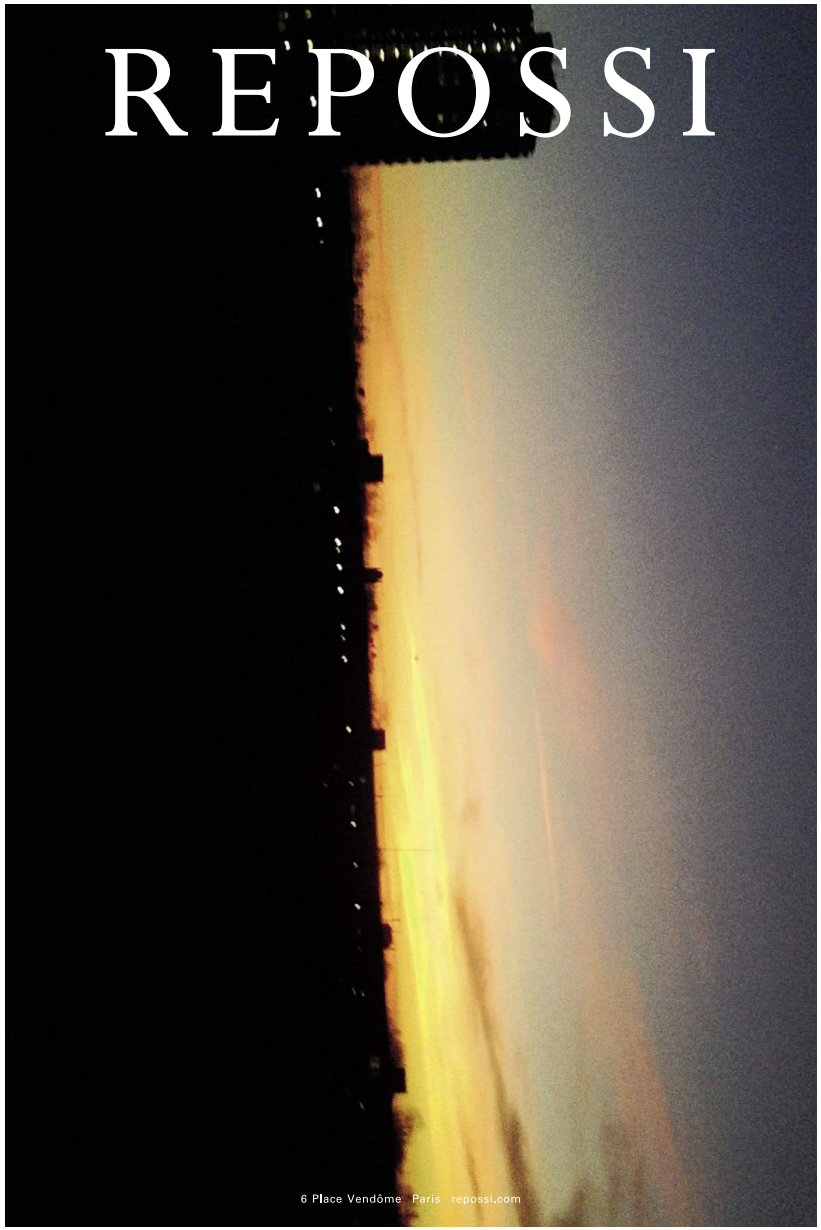
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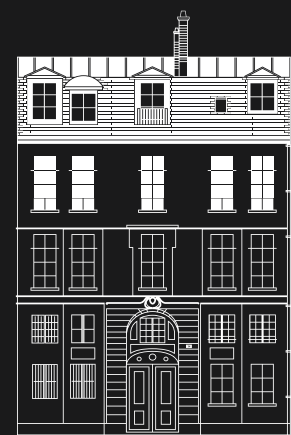

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Cover image: Kim Jones photographed by Juergen Teller, featuring a Dior Book Tote designed by Maria Grazia Chiuri.

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Tim Blanks is a fashion critic and editor-at-large of the Business of Fashion. He's currently obsessed with Instagram's coverage of the decline and fall of Western civilisation. 'But,' he adds, 'in the interests of specificity, I'll choose @the.daily.don for its rage, its hilarity, its wisdom and its draftsmanship.'

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Vanessa Reid is a freelance stylist based in Paris. Transcendental meditation, John Maus and gardening have been her latest obsessions.

Marta Represa is a Spanish writer living in Paris and obsessed with waves. 'Being a surfer lately I've developed a fixation with the mechanics of different waves in different marine landscapes... Geeky, I know!'

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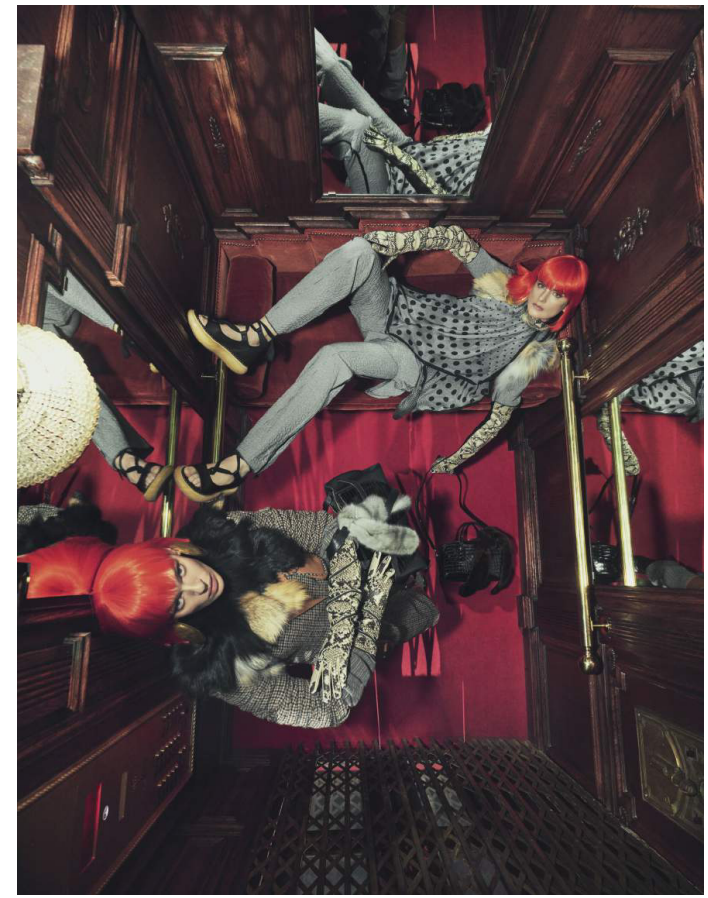

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If there was one invaluable thing that Dior Men cover star Kim Jones was taught by his first boss Michael Kopelman, it was the importance of 'family'.

As a member of the late-1980s International Stüssy Tribe (a loose global network of like-minded individuals bound by a love of streetwear and music), Kopelman understood that embracing other cultures, perspectives and tastes would create fertile ground for a globally appealing commercial venture. Good for business, good for fun.

Twenty years on, Kim Jones brought his own family along for an outing to Christian Dior's childhood home. As Juergen Teller's photographs testify, his is a tribe that includes Korean jewellery impresario Yoon Ahn, Chicago-born, California-raised Matthew Williams of Alyx, and renowned British milliner Stephen Jones. To paraphrase Kim in the accompanying interview: 'I respect what they all do. I didn't want to copy them. So I bought them on-board. I created a family.'

Interestingly, it's not the first fashion family of which Stephen Jones has been a member. The personable and highly talented milliner (look at the exquisite headpiece on page 83 that he spontaneously fashioned using Dior's garden foliage) was part of the chaotic punky family formed around a squat in London's Warren Street in the early 1980s. It was a scene that birthed the likes of Leigh Bowery, Michael Clark and Boy George, as well as Stevie Stewart and David Holah, the duo behind the legendary BodyMap label (page 264), who for a heady decade redefined fashion, throwing it headlong into a new world that merged gender, ethnicity, age, and body size – a catwalk family that Stephen Jones describes as 'a fashion label, a figure of speech, a movement'.

Which isn't a bad way to describe Telfar, in many respects the spiritual kids of BodyMap. For over a decade, New York designer Telfar Clemens and his family of artists, filmmakers and creative spirits (page 122) have been happily exploring and mining the American fashion dream, unconsciously embodying 'diversity', 'community' and the 'non-binary' long before those terms became slogans. Today, the industry – *System* included – has finally caught on.

We're making up for lost (family) time.

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‘The newness had to come from within Dior.’

Kim Jones on taking Dior Men back to the future.

Interview by Farid Chenoune
Photographs by Juergen Teller

DIOR

Bop till Ya Drop

All clothing by Dior Men, Summer 2019 collection

Kim Jones' elegant and romantic debut collection for Dior Men was a vibrant statement of intent. By smartly exploring the idiosyncrasies of the house's founder and using the couture savoir-faire that he put in place, it took Dior menswear back to the future, while adding just the right dose of Jones's street-casual sparkle to make it defiantly of the *now*. By the end of the show, Dior Homme had been transfigured into Dior Men.

To understand more clearly how Kim Jones is building his new vision of now, *System* asked writer and menswear authority Farid Chenoune to visit the designer in his Paris atelier. Then, to re-examine the cultural and professional background that helped mould his view of fashion, Jones reconnected with Michael Kopelman, who as the founder of pioneering clothing importer Gimme Five is not only a British streetwear legend, but also the man who gave the Dior designer his first job nearly 20 years ago. Finally, Jones and his Dior 'family' flew with photographer Juergen Teller to Granville on the Normandy coast to spend an end-of-summer day roaming around Christian Dior's childhood home. It was a welcome moment of calm for Jones, before his return to what he openly describes as 'the difficult second collection' – the next stage of his quest to make menswear modern couture.

'I've looked at how Christian Dior lived and what he loved.'

Kim Jones and Farid Chenoune in conversation, October 10, 2018.

Last June, Kim Jones, the new artistic director at Dior Homme – rechristened Dior Men for the occasion – presented his much-anticipated first collection. His move to the house after seven years designing men's ready-to-wear at Louis Vuitton was part of a more general game of musical chairs within the LVMH group: Kris van Assche moved from Dior Homme to Berluti where he replaced Haider Ackermann, while Off-White designer Virgil Abloh replaced Kim Jones at Vuitton.

Now aged 45, Kim Jones arrives at Dior with a reputation built over 20 years working in men's fashion. His career began in 2001 with a final-year collection at Central Saint Martins praised by his mentor and teacher Louise Wilson and supported by his older peer Lee Alexander McQueen. He twice won the British Fashion Council Menswear Designer of the Year Award, once in 2006 for his own brand and again in 2009, for his work as artistic director at Dunhill. At Louis Vuitton, he redefined the house's menswear, bringing in a more casual vision of modern luxury, which culminated in the spectacular 2017 Louis Vuitton x Supreme collaboration, which has been described as heralding a new era in the relationship between luxury and streetwear brands.

At Dior Men, Jones has designs on a new idea of masculine sophistication, one based in the savoir-faire of the house's ateliers and its haute-couture heritage (he calls the latter a gold mine). Smart, amiable and insatiably curious, Kim Jones pulled himself away from the preparations for his second show (which he describes as 'the hardest') for a conversation in his Paris atelier that took in his way of seeing things, how he creates menswear, and, more generally, fashion itself.

We're here in your workspace, could you tell me about what's around us?
That's our fitting room, where we usually sit and do all the work. We have the atelier downstairs and the team comes up to do the fittings. We do two collections, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter, without a pre-collection in between. We work to the commercial calendar, which is essential because we don't only have our stores, we also have retail and wholesale. We also make lots of mini collections.

Your first collection for Dior went on show in June. How do you feel, looking back at the past few months working for this house?
I came to Dior from Vuitton, which is a very different thing. It is essentially a leather-goods brand, a luggage maker. I loved Vuitton and I still do, but it was a very different way of working. Everything was made in factories, outside of the building, so we didn't have clothes or products with us all the time. Dior, on the other hand, is a couture house; it's a ready-to-wear house. You can approach things in a different way. Here we have an atelier; tailoring is much more prominent here. We work in a much more creative way, and that's the difference. Vuitton is a big, very well-oiled vehicle, but Dior has still got the couture aspect, which is something really amazing to work with as a designer.

Then you bring your own interpretation of what the house is. The existing tailoring is successful so we'll continue with that, because as a commercial person I think like that. But you don't want to be doing something that previous designers have done. It has to be separate.

What steps do you take when you start work on a collection for Dior?
You know, obviously Hedi Slimane started this line, Hedi is now at Celine. Then Kris van Assche was the creative director before me, and Kris is now at Berluti. So when I came to Dior, I decided to go right back to the start: from Christian Dior's childhood up until when he started the couture house. For me, that's an interesting period. It's also very personal. He loved nature; I love nature. There are elements I could relate to, and the archive is really fantastic, as I'm sure you know.[1] There was a lot to see. The one thing that struck me, because I love art, is that Dior was a gallerist before he was a couturier and he had very interesting artists in his galleries. He was working with some of the most important artists of the time.[2] So I looked at that aspect of his work, plus there are the relationships with the people I choose to work with and the world in terms of the digital age and social media. That's something I find interesting, and I wonder what Christian Dior would be doing and looking at now if he were starting out.

'I sometimes wonder what Christian Dior would be doing and looking at – on social media and in the digital world – if he were starting out now.'

Your first collection was full of lightness, with tulle and other sheer fabrics. It was quite a 'garden palette' – colourful, non- aggressive.
Yes, we were looking at essential couture. I like the idea of the romance of the house, and that's what I was looking for in the palette. I wanted to see how you could take things from the archive that belonged to a person. I've looked at how Dior lived and what he loved, and that was really the essence of what we developed. For example, every dog that Dior had was called Bobby.[3] We thought that was a sweet thing. A loyal companion. That's when I started looking at the idea of working with the artist KAWS, because he has this sculpture called *BFF*.[4] The result was his floral statue in the middle of the set,[5] which resembles Monsieur Dior and his dog. We thought that was a nice touch.

Essentially, you were looking at the life of a man called Christian Dior, not necessarily the codes of the brand.
I was looking at the codes as well, but I was predominantly looking at him, because he is still quite a mysterious character, in a way. He was a very private person. He had a loyal team around him, and I think that's very interesting. I was looking at things that he liked in his youth, because essentially fashion now is quite young. I always look at the idea of dressing a man from 16 to 75. I like that aspect.

So you bypassed your predecessors and went back right to the beginning.
For me, it's the most logical way to start. We still look at the commercial elements of the company that are successful – and I say 'we' because it's a team – and then we look at what the newness should be. Because the newness had to come from within Dior.

Instead of looking at Christian Dior as a womenswear couturier, you looked at the man himself. It is interesting that you approach the brand from that viewpoint.
I did look at what he did for women. Because what was considered very feminine in 1950 is something different in 2018. A fabric that was considered only for women could very well be acceptable for men to wear now.

How do you see the masculine/feminine legacy of Christian Dior?
I think it's very relevant for now. He was looking at very masculine coats when he was doing womenswear, and I think you can apply those into the menswear quite easily without it looking feminine. It looks elegant, and I think that is important.

You have much experience designing men's clothes, right from the very beginning of your career and your studies at Central Saint Martins.
I've worked on women's clothes as well. I've done quite a few different things. I graduated from the Central Saint Martins Fashion MA in 2001. I'd started off doing graphics and photography, and I didn't like it, so I switched. I wanted to do something you could create a world around and clothing was the thing I was most interested in. Because you could work with photographers, you could style things, you could art direct things. You could do everything.

There were two people in my life who have been really important in helping give me the confidence to do what I do. One was Louise Wilson,[6] who was my tutor and very dear friend after leaving college, and the other person was Lee McQueen, who was like an older brother. I met him when I was 20. He was really one of the people I could talk to. He was very supportive of my work and liked the fact that I had my own eye and was interested in something different. He supported me, and I worked on one of his labels. They were the two people who I could ask questions to, and who would be, like, 'Just do it, don't care'.

You also had a creative education from your family, right?
Yes, I came from a creative family, and I spent a lot of my childhood in Africa, which was amazing because I saw these incredible people, landscapes and wildlife. One thing when I saw these amazing tribespeople was what felt like their innate sense of style. It is one of my first memories, seeing the Masai people walking, wearing red and blue against a plain background. That was so powerful. It stuck with me. I moved back to London when I was about 14. My sister was leaving home and she gave me her fashion magazines – *The Face* and *i-D* and all that. I opened them and thought: 'This is the world I want to be in.'

I was just always very interested in the way things looked. I am one of those people who looks at everything.

'Dior was looking at masculine coats when he was doing womenswear, and I think you can apply those back into the menswear without it looking feminine.'

I can really bore people because I love examining things just because they're interesting. The thing about being a creative or a designer is that it's your eye that casts the way the brand will look. Even though you are working within the codes of the brand.

To come back to Dior and men's fashion, did you have a silhouette or a line in mind?
The important thing that we established was the oblique suit. It is a very elegant, tailored, simple look. That was really the idea. It should be a little more loose and relaxed but still have elegance. I didn't want it to be that very precise thing that I knew would be shown at other houses.

What do you want to bring to Dior?

One thing that's extremely current is gender fluidity within design. How do you think about these things?
In the past, I've bought a women's knitwear piece from Celine, because I liked it and it fitted me. I didn't see it as a men's or women's garment – it was just a nice piece of knitwear. I have quite a few womenswear pieces from when Margiela did Hermès that don't have buttons on the front; they're very easy wrap-around trenches and stuff. They're from maybe 2001/2002. It's always been that thing that women will wear men's clothes, and some men will wear women's clothes and it isn't necessarily cross-dressing. We live in fashionable cities, so it's specific to certain areas and I think once you get outside of that…

Can you give me an example?

shift in what people actually buy? Now when you go into a luxury shop, the first thing you see is sneakers. It's not 'the bag' any longer.
It's sneakers and it's jerseys, T-shirts, sunglasses. I think people look for comfort, especially in places like Asia where that's very important. I go to every store and talk to people and I hear that comfort and style are the two things that a man needs. When you go to a shop, you touch something first to see if it's soft and comfortable against your skin. I'm very boring sometimes, I'm very sensible and logical about how I work, because I am quite realistic in lots of ways.

Then you have the thing where you do the show and that's the fancy part, but then you break it down into real items. Now I'm working with Dior, for the

'I've been working with stuff that's very street-orientated; that's an important part of menswear. But for Dior I want it to become more elegant.'

I want it to become fresher. I know Dior is very special to Mr. Arnault who owns the company, so I want to make him very proud of the brand, and I want it to become super-loved. That's my goal. It's one of the best houses in the world, so for me being able to do that is a real privilege and a joy. Dior was a little bit more rigid before, and I want it to become a bit more relaxed and sensitive to the fabrication. To react to where we are in 2018 and how men dress. That's completely evolved. But when things evolve, they can also go back a bit. I've been working with stuff that's very street-orientated, and that's a very important part of menswear. But for Dior I want it to become more elegant. Elegance is the key thing for me. It's chic, sophisticated, it's modern. You can wear it in different ways.

If you look at a lot of rappers – who are very masculine – they now wear lots of women's clothing in a very interesting way, which completely defeminizes it. Their influence on the way a younger generation is wearing clothes is very interesting. The styling is super cool. I love seeing someone I don't know wearing clothes that I've designed. It's the biggest thrill. And I love seeing how they've styled them and how they want to wear them; they look really cool. That makes me happy. I don't dictate. I'm not saying, 'You should wear this head to toe'. I like the fact that people are mixing things up. It's exciting. It's like when you look at great stylists working with your clothing – it makes you think about what you do in a different way.

Do you also think that there has been a

first time I could make couture pieces, like the beaded shirts with complicated couture detailing. We wanted to emulate the shine of the ceramics from Mr. Dior's personal dinner service. They're handmade but the feathers are lasercut. Each took nine weeks to make.

Do you know how the shops reacted, and if some looks were better received than others?
Everything was available to buy, and obviously some things are extremely expensive like the shirts, which are made to order. I think generally the collection sold very, very well. There are waiting lists for lots of things.

To come back to the suits and the asymmetrical looks, they were based on an illustration of this oblique line. But you

are not an oblique person, you seem to be very…
I am not so oblique, but I think lots of people don't really know me. I'm quite private, and I like lots of different things. Very modern things, but also very classic things. For example, I have a place in Paris that is very classically French and Parisian, and then I have a place in London that's a brutalist building.

London remains a key part of who you are. When you mentioned Louise Wilson, I was reminded of all the things that I have heard about her. Why was she so charismatic?
Because she really believed in what she did, and because she really cared. That's the thing. Some people would go through the MA and have the worst

people, slam doors in people's faces, stuff like that…

She was demanding…
Yes, but if you can see that in someone and know how to handle that, you can deal with it. I'm very logical in the way I think. I like to have a schedule, and I like to get things done early. I've had the same right-hand, Lucy [Beeden], for 13 years, and she knows my process, so together we're a really good team: organising, managing people, giving people respect. I will let people give me ideas, I will let people work how they want to work, as long as things are done on time. I think it's really important to give designers freedom, because otherwise they get bored.

When I was talking of the London

they didn't care, they just wanted to be themselves. I think that paved the way for lots of other people to be themselves.

Were you like that?
No, I wasn't. I was very shy when I was young. I never ever met someone and just decided, 'I love that person, I want to be their friend'. I'm not like that. Everyone I have met in my life has been through an organic process. I think people who come to my shows come because they're my friends. I think that authenticity is interesting in this day and age. Because I think you have to be true to yourself. And obviously you work for a brand, but you work in the way you like to work, you bring in the people who you want to work: photographers, artists, models, musicians, actors. It's very organic; it's not forced. I

'A lot of rappers – who are obviously really masculine – now wear lots of women's clothing in very interesting ways. It completely defeminizes it.'

time of their lives, because Louise felt she couldn't get out of them what they should be doing. She gave me a lot of self-belief. The last time I saw her was in Bali when we were on holiday, and she was telling me story after story of these things that she shouldn't have done to students. Her partner was like: 'Oh god, you did worse than that, how about that one…' We were laughing about it, because only Louise could get away with that. I think that was her charm. She respected people. She was one of those people who was so tough that when she died it was a massive shock. I really cried a lot because I thought she'd never go away. She was so solid, she didn't give a fuck. She instilled self-belief in people, and I think that's the thing that's important. She could also get extremely rude and throw things at

influence, I was also thinking about your experience at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, Saint Martins, the nightlife…
I think everybody in London went out every night, and it was just because it was social. It was how you would see your friends. We'd go out and socialize, all the designers together, then go home, go to sleep, get up, go to work.

I was reading one of your interviews the other day and you mentioned the Blitz Kids,' who you spoke about with a kind of pride. One sentence in particular touched me: 'They were so brave.'
That was the generation before me, and they were really brave, because they were going through bleak England in the 1980s. I imagine they must've been shouted at, beaten up, screamed at, but

don't like things to be forced, otherwise I don't think they work.

Do you have to struggle to keep it authentic? Because it's not easy.
Yes, but here they have belief in me because they know that what I did at Vuitton worked, and Vuitton is a big machine. I think if you can work in that big machine for seven years and make it bigger and bigger, then you can certainly offer something here. Dior is the pinnacle for me, and it's a really exciting thing to do. I work with Pietro [Beccari, Dior CEO] who I worked with at Vuitton, and I have a really amazing relationship with him. That gives me self-confidence – like Louise Wilson or Lee McQueen did.

In London you were close to people

like Christopher Nemeth[8] and Judy Blame[9] What remains with you about those people?
I was aware of Christopher Nemeth more through magazines. I only met him shortly before he died, because he lived in Tokyo. I met Judy Blame when I was very young, probably 16. He was such an impressive person, and someone who I became close to later in life. Sadly, he died earlier this year.

He was such a great, multi-talented artist.
Jewellery, styling – everything. We have been working on his book for a long time with the people at Michael Nash,[10] and it's changed and evolved quite a lot. The last weekend I had with him was really sad because he told me he was dying. He asked: 'Please can you just make sure you finish the book.' He was in a really good place in his life, very happy and content with what he was doing, and within a month he was gone.

The way that people like Judy dressed up, using all sorts of materials and fabrics – were you part of that, or were there two worlds? The world of what you do as a designer and what you wear as a person.
Back in the day, my friends and I would basically customize things to go out. We didn't have any money, so we'd share each other's clothes all the time. Something would be passed around and it would be changed a little bit by each person. Stuff like that. But as you get older, you get a uniform of things that you feel comfortable in. When I get to work I think about clothes all the time, so I don't think about dressing myself up. I think about my job. But I have things for different occasions. I have stuff that I love but wouldn't necessarily wear. Sometimes I'll just buy something because I really like the garment and think that it's beautiful.

So you buy to collect, not to wear?
Yes. I have a very large archive of clothes. It's an exceptionally rare archive, because it's probably the only collection like it. It's London street style from 1971 to about 1989 and it's got Leigh Bowery, Rachel Auburn, Stephen Linard,[11] Christopher Nemeth, Westwood.

For men and for women?
Yes, everything. This is something really interesting, for example. [Holds up shirt] It's Adam Ant's anarchy shirt. He loved this so much. This is probably from 1976. I bought it off his ex-wife. But I can show you more on my phone; I have my clothing collection on here…

How much does this collection inform your own work?
The clothes inspire me by the fact that they are beautiful. They're not something that I look at directly. It's a different thing. We look at old clothes, things with nice fabrics. When you look back at clothes of the 1950s, fabric manufacturing was really good. When you work in luxury or couture, you have to appreciate these things.

How did you see luxury brands like Dior, Chanel or Yves Saint Laurent when you were starting out?
They were very relevant. I think that when people were forging or customizing a lot of things, like printing a fake Chanel T-shirt, it was this gateway into understanding the brands, because you'd recognize the monogram before you even knew what it really meant. I think it was that sort of thing. When we were at college, we had to go the library because we couldn't afford to buy a password to Catwalking.com or First View to see the collections as they came out. Everybody wanted to see Helmut Lang at that time or Margiela. It was a different moment. Dior was probably the one that stood out because John Galliano was a Central Saint Martins graduate and he was making big waves. We were all fascinated by the spectacle.

Galliano was at Dior from 1996 to 2001, so you were still at school.
Yes, and it was so awe-inspiring. There were these grand spectacles and Dior looked like the most powerful house in the world. When I graduated John Galliano bought half my collection.

Was it a men's collection?
Yes, and it was in an exhibition at a store called the Pineal Eye,[12] which was the cool avant-garde store at the time in London. I went somewhere for a couple of days and came back and they said: 'We sold it all.' It was a mix of street, denim, and a lot of handmade pieces where I'd made the fabrics myself. I would do schoolboy blazers but in a weird fucked-up way. Hand-knitted things and stuff. It was a lot of one-off pieces. I was quite upset that it got sold because I wanted to keep it.

'My graduate collection combined street, denim, and handmade pieces, like weird fucked-up schoolboy blazers. John Galliano bought half that collection.'

Is there anything left of the spirit of those beginnings in your work today?
Fabrics. We can ask really amazing factories to make us a really beautiful fabric, and it's just for us. And I think it's really important, when people are spending at this price point, that they get a unique thing, and that the house is the only house that has that fabric or technique.

You've said you can't stand the word 'streetwear' anymore.
I don't think it's relevant any longer because everyone wears clothes on the street. I think the difference between streetwear and fashion houses is the price point essentially. I think it's all cross-pollinated now. Someone will wear something that's a piece of streetwear with a piece of fashion, or something that's high street. People mix things up so much, I think it's just style. I think style is the thing to look at.

Do you think that in terms of style women and men are now on the same level?
In certain places, yes. Like Tokyo, which is one of my favourite places. For me the Japanese designers are the thing… I mean, there was Lee, Helmut Lang, Margiela, Vivienne Westwood, lots of amazing designers, but I was really attracted to Japanese designers and particularly Jun Takahashi from Undercover, because I met him when I was at college. I was working for Michael Kopelman, who had a company called Gimme Five. They imported Undercover, A Bathing Ape, Good Enough, all these labels that nobody else could get. Even Supreme, which back then was really small. I was very lucky because Michael was a very generous guy and he'd always give us clothes, so I'd always have these things and people would be, like: 'Where are they from?' Back then, I thought those brands were so expensive because I didn't have any money at all. They were really well designed. Every single bit of hardware was personalized. Most of them were made in Japan, and Japanese manufacturing is really interesting. When I had my own label we sold a lot to Japanese stores, and it was cheap to make it in Japan and to export it from Japan to the US, in terms of taxes. You could get fabrics that you couldn't get in Europe. We spent a lot of time there, and it's a place I'm always really drawn to.

Why did you decide to stop your own company?
It was when I got offered the job at Dunhill. I had always wanted to be the creative director of a luxury-goods house. That was always my goal. I never wanted to do my own label; it was my friends telling me to do it. I did a project for Louis Vuitton when I graduated, and then 10 years later I got that job at Vuitton. I saw the facilities that they had – I saw the grandness – and I was attracted. You know when you get a feeling, and it's like, 'I want to do that'. I am quite focused. I'm not a planner in life. Apart from my schedule, I just go with the flow, and I think that's the most important thing to do. I always look at life in chapters. I had a really amazing time with my label. I travelled the world, I met loads of interesting people, but my goal was to work for a luxury-goods house and be the creative director. And they said: 'You can only do the job if you stop the label.' I stopped my label, and that money enabled me to buy a house, which I wouldn't have been able to afford before. It was like growing up, I guess. I was doing menswear in London, and there wasn't really anybody else doing that unless it was Paul Smith or Burberry. My first show in Paris cost me €150,000, and that's a lot of money when you're an independent designer. I thought that if I didn't show in Paris, I wouldn't be taken seriously.

Did you think that choosing to do menswear was more difficult than designing them for women? Were there fewer opportunities?
I did menswear because I wanted to make clothes for me and my friends. That was the initial thing. We couldn't find the things that we wanted. Those things from Japan were incredibly inspiring. Menswear is more challenging to do, in a way. It's more constricted. I don't know why I decided to do it. I just did.

Do you like working within those parameters?
I like working for a house with a good archive. Dunhill, for example, has the most amazing archive. I think that's the most interesting thing for me. It's really important. At a label, you have the support, you have the team, you have great people to make something on a global level. I could easily relaunch my own label, but I'm done with it. I've issued my stuff for the 10th anniversary. When

'The term streetwear is no longer relevant; everyone wears clothes on the street. The difference between streetwear and fashion houses is the price point.'

it's your name, it's always your name… I like to keep myself a bit in the background, I guess. To have a bit of privacy. When you see people who have been really successful, like Lee, it's often really hard for them, because it's their name. Anything would be upsetting if it's a negative comment. I'm not that kind of person, but I can see what it did to people.

A stupid question: traditionally couturiers used to have muses, icons, idols, real people. That type of thing is very rare in the masculine world. Who are your muses?
There are certain people I find very inspiring like Peter Beard, because he was a handsome guy who went out and did amazing things in the world. I'm fascinated by Warhol, by his world domination. Francis Bacon because he is interesting as a person, and was super crazy. We have a group of guys who have modelled with us for quite a long time, and they've become friends, so it's easy to work with them. There's four or five guys that we constantly have with us; their energy is very positive in the room and it helps when you're doing fittings.

Are those guys you've always worked with? At Vuitton, too?
Yes, but then we're also doing new casting here because it's important to change things.

Do you direct the way they walk and their gestures?
Yes. There's Etienne Russo from villa eugénie[13] who works on the show; he's very precise in the way he talks with the guys. But sometimes you can see that a guy is a bit shy or that it's his first time, so I walk next to them when we do the rehearsals to build them up and make them feel confident about doing it. We had Prince Nikolai of Denmark in the first show with the first look, because royalty is part of the history of Dior and because I'm half-Danish. I thought it was a nice thing to have as my first statement for Dior.

Speaking of collaborators, how do you work with Melanie Ward?[14]
Melanie comes in to do the fittings with us. It's a very easy way of working. I worked with her for my last show at Vuitton, and before that with Alister Mackie,[15] who is still a really good friend of mine. What's funny about Melanie is that she's the stylist that all other stylists admire, because she is really set in her ways. We actually laugh quite a lot, which I guess is quite rare in a lot of these houses. We take our work very seriously, but we take it with a certain lightness, and I think that's a really nice way to work.

Does she bring new insights?
Yes. For example, when you're working with very rich fabrics and you're layering things up, sometimes it just helps to simplify things. I know what I want from the beginning to the end of a season, and sometimes you loop around and end up back at the start. From the start, I know how I want it to look.

We are doing the second collection now, and I think it's more challenging than the first, because for the first one you go in running, but with the second you're processing what's happened with the first one, what was successful, in terms of figures, etc. I find the second one the most challenging. I still have the confidence to know that I can do it well. I've got confidence in my work because I've proved it critically and commercially. But even so, you have days where you're, like: 'What am I doing? Right, that's it, I'm just looking at the same fabrics again and again.' Now I'm quite fast in terms of making decisions; I just think you have to be decisive.

Do you look at the pictures that get taken for campaigns and other parts of the business?
I look at everything. You have to. Consistency is the one thing I think people need to see when you're starting at a brand and you're making things work. You've got to have the message running across everything. The one thing Dior respects incredibly is the artistic vision of the creative director. I have to say that of all the houses I have ever seen, it's probably the most respectful.

What about the jewellery?
I have Yoon[16] working with me on that. She is somebody I've always wanted to work with, and I love her jewellery. There are two people who I admire, Matthew Williams,[17] who did the buckles for us, and Yoon. And I would never want to copy somebody's work; I just want them to come and work with me. It's nice to have that second opinion, it's nice to have somebody come in from Tokyo and they've seen something cool. Jewellery is an important business now. Victoire[18] is at Dior jewellery and I think she's the most amazing woman in the world. I love her so much. I would love to do something with her as well; it's about finding the right time to do something. What she creates is high jewellery. It's a different thing.

Final question: there are very few black suits in the show. Is that a statement?
There are still black suits within the commercial collection and a lot of black things, but I wanted to have colour.

Is it a new chapter you want to write at Dior Men?
When I sat down with Mr. Arnault and Pietro, the two things that Mr. Arnault said were 'colour' and 'fun'. You know, I work for somebody at the end of the day, and I respect what my bosses think. That's important, too.

'It's been really hard for people like Lee [McQueen] who have been very successful. Because it's their name. Any negative comment would be upsetting.'

1. To celebrate its 70th anniversary in 2017, Dior opened a large custom-designed archive in an underground location near the company's headquarters.

2. Christian Dior founded his fashion house aged 42, having begun his professional life as an art dealer. His first gallery, a partnership with his dealer friend Jacques Bonjean, opened in 1928 in in a space just off Rue de la Boétie in Paris. The duo's aim was to show both established artists, including Picasso, Braque, Matisse and Dufy, and newcomers, such as Salvador Dalí, Max Jacob, and Eugène and Leonid Berman. After closing the business in 1931, he teamed up with Pierre Colle to open another gallery, this time in Rue Cambacérès, in 1932. One of the first shows was a surrealist exhibition featuring Marcel Duchamp (who exhibited his 1914 work *Pharmacie*), Dalí, Picasso and Giacometti.

3. Christian Dior was famously obsessed with his dog, a mongrel named Bobby. According to *Et Dior créa Victoire*, Dior model Victorine Doutreleau's autobiography, each season, one suit, which was always modelled by the house's then top model, was given the name Bobby 'in memory of one of M. Dior's dogs'.

4. KAWS (whose real name is Brian Donnelly) is an American artist. His statue *BFF* (or 'Best Friends Forever') is an eight-metre-tall sculpture of a blue cartoon-style figure, which was first unveiled in June 2016 in Bangkok, Thailand.

5. At the centre of the set for Jones' first Dior show was KAWS' 10-metre-tall statue of Christian Dior and his dog Bobby. The sculpture, which took four days to create, was covered with 70,000 fresh peonies and roses.

6. Louise Wilson was course director of the Fashion Design MA at Central Saint Martins from 1992 until her death, aged 52, in 2014.

7. The Blitz Kids were a group of trendy young men and women, including Boy George, Midge Ure, John Galliano, Stephen Jones, Stephen Linard, Sade and Marilyn, who attended Steve Strange (later of Visage) and Rusty Egan's Tuesday club night in 1979 to 1980. It began in a basement bar called Billy's in London's Soho and later moved to the Blitz nightclub in Covent Garden, and was celebrated for its strict, yet outrageous and flamboyant dress code.

8. Christopher Nemeth began his career in the early 1980s making handsewn clothes from found fabrics, most famously, linen mail sacks. In 1985, he was wearing one of his own designs and was spotted by photographer Mark Lebon, which led to a shoot in *i-D* and his clothes being stocked in high-profile boutique Bazaar. In 1986, Nemeth moved to Tokyo to join his future wife, Keiko, selling his clothing in a store in Harajuku, while Rei Kawakabo of Comme des Garçons stocked Nemeth's line in Dover Street Market in London. Nemeth died of lung cancer aged 51 in September 2010.

9. Judy Blame was born Chris Barnes. After a childhood in Spain and the UK, he embraced punk (buying clothes from Vivienne Westwood in her shop Seditionaries), then New Romanticism (he was a key player on the Blitz and Heaven scene), and began making jewellery from found objects. He later became a renowned stylist. In 2016, a retrospective of his career, *Never Again*, was held at the ICA in London. Blame died on February 19, 2018, aged 58.

10. Michael Nash Associates is a graphic-design company founded in London in 1984 by Stephanie Nash and Anthony Michael.

11. Rachel Auburn met Leigh Bowery at Kensington Street Market, where she had opened a stall in 1982. The pair –members of the Blitz scene – designed clothes together including an infamous collection launched in 1983 in New York, which featured clothing stitched together from fabric found on the street in London. Bowery died on New Year's Eve 1994 aged 33; Auburn is now a yoga teacher. Stephen Linard's *Reluctant Emigrés* graduation menswear collection at Saint Martin's in 1981 was an instant legend. He founded his own label and designed clothes for musicians including David Bowie, Fun Boy 3 and the Pet Shop Boys, before moving to Japan. He now lives in London and works as a fashion consultant.

12. Opened in 1997, the Pineal Eye was the brainchild of Kokon To Zai founder Yuko Yabiku, with help from Nicola Formichetti, now Diesel's creative director, and Eric Portès. The tiny basement store at 49 Broadwick Street in Soho, London, specialized in rising designers such as Bernhard Wilhelm and Ann Sofie Back and one-off pieces by the more established, including Alexander McQueen and Viktor&Rolf. The store has since closed and been replaced by an estate agent.

13. Created in 1995, villa eugénie is a production company specializing in live commercial and fashion shows. He has produced over 800 for brands including Chanel (including the mega-shows in Paris's Grand Palais), Dior Homme, Dries Van Noten (every show since 1991), and Miu Miu.

14. Melanie Ward is a stylist and brand consultant. She played a large part in creating the 'grunge' aesthetic in the late 1980s-early 1990s, working with photographers including David Sims, Corinne Day and Glen Luchford, to create looks that, in their celebration of thrift, customization and found clothing, were an antidote to the prevailing era of gloss. In the early 1990s, she began working Calvin Klein and Jil Sander and, from 1992, with Helmut Lang with whom she was particularly close. 'I've never met anyone who had such similar taste to me,' she told BoF in 2017. 'They used to call me the female Helmut.'

15. Alister Mackie began his career at *Dazed & Confused*. He is now fashion director for *Another Man* and has worked as a consultant and stylist for brands including Louis Vuitton, Prada, Dior, Dunhill, and Miu Miu, and magazines such as *L'Uomo Vogue*, *Arena Homme Plus* and *AnOther*.

16. Yoon Ahn began working at Dior in April 2018, having previously collaborated with Jones at Louis Vuitton. She also designs for her brand Ambush, which she co-founded with her husband, Japanese rapper Verbal, in 2008.

17. Matthew Williams created Alyx, a luxury streetwear brand, in 2015. He had previously worked as a creative director for Lady Gaga and was part of 'art collective and DJ crew' label Been Trill alongside Heron Preston and Virgil Abloh.

18. Victoire de Castellane began her career at Chanel in 1984; she has been the creative director of Dior's fine jewellery line since 1998.

'It was like a secret society.'

Kim Jones and Michael Kopelman in conversation, October 17, 2018.

By taking the craft and culture of Dior's couture atelier and allying it to his specific vision of sharp wearability, Kim Jones revealed a desire to establish new codes for modern menswear. Fusing quality, comfort and attitude, it is a sartorial philosophy that's partly grounded in Jones' undying passion for 'classic' streetwear, the kind of hip, innovative clothing that he first came across 20 years ago while working at Michael Kopelman's London-based distribution company Gimme Five. Kopelman – part of the International Stüssy Tribe, alongside the likes of James Jebbia (founder of Supreme), Hiroshi Fujiwara (future designer of Goodenough) and Luca Benini (impresario behind Italian streetwear enterprise Slam Jam) – opened Gimme Five in 1989 to import into the UK previously unavailable and unknown labels, many of them Japanese and American. It was these clothes, from such pioneers as Undercover, Visvim and Neighbourhood, that formed Jones' mental fashion map and opened up new possibilities of how to combine his high-fashion training at Central Saint Martins with an altogether more street-based clothing culture. He still recalls with excitement the thrill of unpacking the boxes in Kopelman's warehouse and examining each garment's precise cut, intricate detailing and unerring attitude. With this in mind, *System* asked Kim Jones and Michael Kopelman – his first boss – to get on a call for a long-overdue catch-up. Together the pair reflected on the clubs and shops of London's Soho, whether 'streetwear' is now a derogatory term, the enduring influence of mashing up Stüssy, Seditionaries and high-tops, the Wag Club, punk, Ron Hardy's classic house, and dressing head-to-toe in A Bathing Ape.

Kim Jones: Let's start with you. How did you start getting interested in clothing and how did Gimme Five begin?
Michael Kopelman: Well, I was always interested in clothing and into clubs and music. I spent the first pocket money I ever had on records.
Kim: I was the same.
Michael: My mother had an antique shop in Camden Passage[1] and I used to go with her. I would go around the markets with my pocket money and got into buying army-surplus stuff. You could have a real GI look and get those big army pants. I suppose that was around the time of punk, and you could also pick up lots of cool stuff around Portobello and Islington. You had to have the right gear to go out, so there was a real look that we wore to try and get into clubs. My sister worked at Fiorucci,[2] and when I went to see her there I could see people going through a blue door down the street into a hairdresser called Smile.[3] I went there with a copy of *Pin Ups*[4] when I was about 13, in my school uniform, asking to get the same haircut as David Bowie, which I suppose was a pretty mad thing to do. I had left home when my parents went to live in New York, and was working in the City.[5] I visited them there and my roommate James Lebon,[6] who had also gone to live there, and over there you could hear all the hip-hop on WBLS.[7] I saw Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's stuff and I saw fashion around me, not high fashion, what people around me were wearing. I was interested in doing something different. I was DJing at the Wag[8] and there was a club called the Brain[9] where people wore punk leathers, but also wore high-tops and TROOP jackets.[10] Everyone was mixing everything together. Eventually, after going to New York and DJing there, I got asked by Stüssy to DJ for them in Japan. Stüssy was really hard to find here in London, so when I was made redundant from my job, I went to California and asked them if they wanted me to work for them in the UK. That's how I started my company.
Kim: I remember one of the first things I saw that made me interested in fashion and music was when *The Face* did all of those double-page spreads on clubs in London like the Brain. That was my first inkling into that world, looking at it as an outsider, as a kid.
Michael: We bought all the magazines, *i-D* and *The Face*, and we looked at what people were wearing, particularly the people from the clubs that we knew. Magazines had a massive influence over what was popular. Not many people had those kinds of American things like goose jackets or high-tops or TROOP. It was only because we knew the people on the door of the clubs – because we'd been going for so long or DJing there – that they let us in.
Kim: Talking about Westwood and the punk thing – I find it weird when people talk about 'streetwear' because there was totally a fashion element to it. Westwood was involved and Malcolm McLaren was a great stylist in terms of how he made things look.
Michael: I am really familiar with the term 'streetwear' – people have been using that term since the early 1990s, but it's only really recently that it's been anything other than a derogatory term.
Kim: I don't think it's necessarily derogatory; I just don't think people have known how to label what it is, because the quality and the make and the manufacturing and the thought processes have really developed over the years
Michael: Back in the day, all those things had real meaning. Everything that you wore had a meaning and was connected to culture. Now it's not connected to any culture. A mohair sweater with holes in it is 'punk'. Or a skateboard T-shirt is 'streetwear'. But it's not. Anyone could be wearing that stuff. It doesn't have any special meaning now; it is just another category.
Kim: You had such a defined look with everyone you hung out with. I remember the Stüssy Tribe and seeing and really admiring that look, and just thinking how amazing everyone looked.
Michael: When I had my shop, I went to Pineal Eye and I remember looking around and seeing the clothes that you'd made. I immediately understood that they were different from the other things there. I contacted you because I wanted to talk to you and I could kind of connect to you through what you were doing.
Kim: I remember music being very influential at Gimme Five because there would always be something playing in the stock room when we were packing boxes, tapes with Ron Hardy[11] and Farley 'Jackmaster' Funk, and other stuff. That completely blew my mind and got me interested in that cultural side of things, because for me, music and clothing go hand in hand. I mean, I got really obsessed by Ron Hardy when I was at Gimme Five and I would be asking what track was playing and going to the record fairs each weekend to find the 12" of everything, because it wasn't easy to get. And I started reading about the Music Box[12] and the different styles of people who would go there. That was what inspired my collection at college that went into Pineal Eye, because there was that mix of punk and that preppy Ralph Lauren guy who went there. I loved the idea of everything being mashed together.
Michael: It was definitely an outsider culture.
Kim: You can still find that now in places like Cape Town, but it's not particularly easy to find in big cities these days. I guess information is so much more freely available. Everything catches on much more quickly. I remember waiting for copies of *i-D* and *The Face* to come out so I could see what was going on and what people were wearing. Things were very limited. I remember being with you and unpacking boxes of stuff, like Undercover or A Bathing Ape, and just looking at all the details and thinking how amazingly thought out and super elevated things were. I remember when you would bring round the Undercover catalogue and we would look at it.
Michael: We had access to all of that stuff and were ordering it. It was like a secret society.
Kim: It was. And I remember you were always very generous and would let us order things. I've still got all that stuff because it was just so brilliant. It completely transformed the way I thought about clothes. I remember I always wanted to go and work for Levi's in San Francisco after college – that was my dream. But then everything changed when I left college and evolved in a different way.
Michael: Well, it sounds like it worked out well!
Kim: [Laughs] I was talking to someone in the office the other day who was saying they used to dream of becoming the print designer at Top Shop, and we were like, 'We've certainly gone a different way than we thought we would!' That time in London was good, though. There was a lot of energy and diversity and integration and you would go to places and there would be so many different types of people. You would meet someone from a completely different background almost every time you went somewhere, which is partly why I love London so much.
Michael: I like living in the UK. Time has gone by really quickly since we started the company, and it's interesting to see the progression of all the brands and how big it has all got, because it wasn't like that when we started. And there weren't that many famous DJs and there wasn't a big culture behind it. The brands that we worked with just weren't big.
Kim: Yet all those Japanese brands that you pioneered and brought into the UK have gone on to become so influential.
Michael: I am really happy for them all.

'I went to Smile the hairdressers when I was 13, in my school uniform, asking to get the same haircut as Bowie, which was a pretty mad thing to do.'

'People have been using the term streetwear since the early 1990s, but it's only recently that it's been considered anything other than derogatory.'

It was always the case that I would find stuff and get really excited about it and then really struggle to persuade anyone that it was any good. That was how I opened Hit and Run, and the Hideout. But what we were doing just wasn't popular. Supreme was always popular; the other things just weren't. There was just a small niche of people who were into it. Even with sneakers. When we turned the Hideout into a pop-up shop and had all of these special sneakers from Nike, we had them because people weren't really interested in them. And opening Foot Patrol was very difficult. It wasn't a popular shop, and now when you look at how big everything is, it's really unbelievable. It just got bigger and bigger and bigger.

Kim: With Fraser Cooke[13] at Hit and Run, I'd help fold the T-shirts and sweep the floor and stuff, but we were obsessed by the clothes there. It had a real cult following, and other people didn't know about it, which was partly why we loved it so much. It was kind of like a club. When you saw someone else wearing it, you knew they knew it. Everyone would be freaking out when they saw someone wearing it walking down the street in Soho. I found loads of funny pictures of us sitting in Golden Square, and I was dressed head-to-toe in A Bathing Ape. People just wouldn't have known what that was back then.

Michael: Yes, we were really into that. It's nice to see that people like it now. It's amazing how long it takes to spread.

Kim: It was like a very slow burn that then went really fast. I remember you built a sense of community around the brands and the people who worked at Gimme Five, and it was a very family feel. You created a fun environment where people would look forward to coming in to work. You taught me a lot about how to work with people and how to treat people in the office. That was something I picked up from a very early point.

Michael: Well, thank you – it's obviously stood you in good stead!

Kim: I work with Fraser quite a lot because of the Nike collaboration[14] and we really enjoy our Dad-joke sessions, laughing over *Viz*[15] captions. I think it's quite a rare way of working, but it is a very successful one. Marc Jacobs works in a similar way. I was talking to Jony Ive[16] at Apple about it the other day and he was saying it's about having a team that you are close to. You're with them all the time, so you have to enjoy the process. That is absolutely true. Another thing you taught me was how, when Hiroshi[17] and then Nigo[18] were over and came into Gimme Five, you would always introduce everyone to everyone. Did you meet Hiroshi through Stüssy when you went to DJ or was it before that?

Michael: Actually, I was DJing in London and we knew some guys from Bristol and one of the people that we really looked up to was a DJ called Mil'o[19] who had some records on the Major Force label.[20] I was in Camden Market and saw this guy walk past in a Major Force jacket and I was, like, 'Oi! Come here!' And I grabbed him and it turned out to be Hiroshi. I asked him where he got the jacket from, and then it turned out that we had some friends in common. And then, when I went to Japan, just by chance Hiroshi and I were DJing together in this kind of superclub. He is a great DJ with really good taste in music, and I asked him to take me to Major Force, because I wanted to get more records. It was very hard to get all the promos. Back in London, I went to a shop called Bluebird Records where they sold lots of imports and I swapped some of them for US promos. There was like a 12-year-old in the shop who was up for doing some bargaining – he turned out to be James Lavelle.[21]

Kim: That's crazy!

Michael: I know! I like to think that is how James Lavelle first got his hands on Major Force records and how he had the ambition to do Mo'Wax.

Kim: There was a real synergy to that time. It was an interesting organic process. There wasn't a thing where people network like they do now. Everything that has happened to me has happened in a very organic way. I never planned anything, I just go with the flow. I think that at that time, things just happened, which made things exciting. There was real scope for possibilities.

Michael: When I worked in the City, I knew that there was good music in Tokyo and I went there on business. I went out there by myself looking for acts like the guys from Major Force. Looking back, it's so funny because I would finish my job and do all my duties and then go out all night looking for this stuff. And there was just so much gear and so much info to soak up and you couldn't really get it from anywhere else. I remember buying these Levi's jeans that were in a box and bringing them back to England, and people were asking me, like, 'What is that?'

Kim: That was the anniversary jean?

Michael: They'd bought the original looms for the jeans and set them up and remade jeans that they'd then put in a box. I just used to come back with all this stuff. It was really, really good fun. I wanted to go to Akihabara[22] to buy all this stuff and when I got there, I just couldn't believe all the Seditionaries[23] reproductions, and all these records that were really rare and difficult to get hold of here. It was all there. It was an exciting place, full of cult-y stuff.

Kim: It is probably where I do most of my shopping. There is so much to see and I love just looking at everyone in the street. The second time I went to Japan I just completely fell in love and I have been going back constantly. I could live there at some point. I do love it.

Michael: I've kind of calmed down now, [laughs] but back in the early Gimme Five days, we used to get a lot of stuff from over there, and we used to send a lot of stuff there, too. We worked with Judy Blame, had a distributor and made our own products; it was really exciting. When I moved out of home, I moved into Great Portland Street and met James and Mark Lebon[24] and I remember going to their place in New Cavendish Street and meeting Judy and Ray Petri.[25] All of those guys had been to Japan and had a big influence over my taste. Mark was working with Judy and Christopher Nemeth. It was a really amazing time.

Kim: And all the work that happened then is all still so relevant. I mean, it is referenced non-stop. Let's talk about Judy. He was amazing because he looked at everything in every single way. He made high and low, and whatever you want to call it. He basically mixed everything up in a really great way. I think a lot of people don't actually realize that he did it, either.

Michael: What a great guy; I miss him a lot. I didn't really appreciate how fantastic he was when I first worked with him, although we had a really big output. We were just trying to pay the bills and make work together. Now when I look back I really see how amazing he was. I really believe in all of the statements that he was making.

Kim: I came in at the tail end of it all, seeing the things that he'd done without realizing that it was actually him. It goes back to that cultural aspect of work, which for me now is one thing that I try to do because it's the most relevant way to get people to connect to what we do. I think it's also how we live our lives – the cultural side is everything. The music, the fashion, the people. That's one of the things that I learned early on from you and from meeting Judy and all these different people, like André Walker.[26]

Michael: You can't go to the Wag Club and see Leigh Bowery[27] in the bathroom any more. It's very hard to discover all this stuff. I see people picking up on it all now, and that's great. But Judy – I feel very privileged that I could meet him, see him in action and be friends with him. I feel the same about Mark Lebon and all the people I know who are still standing from that time.

Kim: I like to see the next generation of people making an impact on the world in a creative way, too.

Michael: I'm into the same things I've been into since I started working, so whether it is vintage stuff, technical stuff or utility stuff, that is what I like. I never really go outside that comfort zone. The music is very important to me and I am always looking for new and old music. I look at all the sites and at what people do. But the people I have a connection with are the most satisfying to watch and follow.

Kim: I think I like all the same things, too, but obviously when I work for different places, I look at their archives as well. I still love all the same stuff, it's just gone in a different way. There are things I dreamed about and I have done them, and I still love all the things I've always loved. It just evolves.

Michael: I don't know how you get your head around doing what you do. Congratulations for managing to do it!

Kim: I'm still figuring it out myself! Thanks, Michael.

'I'd help fold the T-shirts and sweep the floor, but we were obsessed by the clothes there. It had a real cult following, that other people didn't know about.'

Back to the future

1. Camden Passage is a small street near Angel Underground station in Islington, north London, long known for its antique shops.

2. Fiorucci's first store in London – at 126 King's Road – opened in 1975 and contained ramps for roller-skating. The brand later opened another shop on Brompton Road, which was where Michael's sister worked.

3. Smile was perhaps London's hippest hairdressers for much of the 1970s and 1980s. Its main stylist, Keith Wainwright, cut and styled the hair of Bryan Ferry, David Bowie, Elton John, Debbie Harry, Vivienne Westwood and Toyah Willcox (who was sent to Keith by Derek Jarman before she starred in *Jubilee*). Keith is still cutting hair and can be found at Williams & Rice on Smith Street in Chelsea on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

4. *Pin Ups*, an album of cover versions, was released in 1973. The cover image features Bowie and 1960s supermodel Twiggy. The singer's hair is styled in what can only be described as an orangey-red super mullet.

5. The City of London is the historical centre of London, a 2.9km^2 area in which the large majority of the UK's legal and financial services are found. While only just over 9,000 live in what is often called the Square Mile, over 300,000 commute in every day. In the late 1970s, Michael Kopelman worked there as a commodities trader.

6. James Lebon was a hairdresser who co-owned Cuts, a well-known and influential salon in Kensington Market, which became the centre of London's burgeoning hip-hop and proto-streetwear scene. Lebon later moved to New York to study film, became a director of music videos (for Bomb the Bass and Curiosity Killed the Cat, among others), met Shawn Stüssy and, with Kopelman, brought the designer's brand to London. He died after suffering a heart attack just before Christmas 2008; he was 49.

7. WBLS or World's Best Looking Sound is a New York-based radio station and, according to its website, 'America's most recognizable black radio station, laying the foundation for feel-good crossover tunes and a sincere dedication for community outreach'.

8. The Wag Club was run by Chris Sullivan and Ollie O'Donnell and opened on October 19, 1982, in London's Soho. Alongside its wide range of concerts and DJs, it became known as the pioneering hip-hop club in the UK, hosting, for example, a show in early November 1982 that featured Afrika Bambaataa, Grand Wizard Theodore, Jazzy Jay and Fab 5 Freddy, the Double Dutch Girls, and the Rock Steady Crew, plus Futura 2000 spray-painting on stage. The club closed in 2001.

9. The Brain was, like the Wag, on Wardour Street in Soho. It was a key venue for the early house and techno scene hosting DJs such as Norman Cook, Moby, Andrew Weatherall and A Guy Called Gerald.

10. In the late 1980s, TROOP was briefly the hottest streetwear brand in the world. Created in 1985 by a south Bronx storeowner, Teddy Held, it produced deliberately high-end, exclusive and expensive sneakers and clothing. The Brooklyn-made gear quickly became a favourite of rap's biggest stars, including MC Hammer, and Chuck D and Flava Flav from Public Enemy. LL Cool J had his own personalized version of the particularly popular TROOP jacket, a classic varsity jacket reworked with strong patterns, colours and logos. About three years after its launch, however, a rumour suddenly began to circulate: TROOP was actually being made by the Ku Klux Klan as a way to rip off inner-city kids. Indeed, the rumours continued, TROOP stood for 'To Rule Over Oppressed People' and under the soles of the sneakers was a hidden racist message. None of which was true – TROOP actually stood for 'Total Respect of Our Oppressed People' – but the damage was done and TROOP was finished. Looking back on the adventure, in 2015 with Highsnobiety.com, Teddy Helm was stoical: 'I enjoyed meeting people, I enjoyed travelling the world, finding out people were the same. We all have our quirks, but the reality is: we are still people.'

11. Ron Hardy was pioneer of early house music. He was a well-known fixture on the early Chicago house scene, playing at the Ritz, 326 and the Music Box. He died in 1992 aged 34, reportedly of an AIDS-related illness.

12. Influential Chicago club the Music Box was run by Robert Williams, previously the owner of the Warehouse, which had closed when Frankie Knuckles had left to start his own club. It first opened in February 1983 at 1632 South Indiana Avenue and later moved to a juice bar on Lower North Michigan Avenue. The Music Box would eventually become one of the birthplaces of Chicago house before being shuttered in 1987 by a new city ordinance that reduced the legal operating hours of juice bars.

13. Fraser Cooke is now Global Energy Marketing Director at Nike. He co-founded legendary London sneaker store Foot Patrol with Kopelman.

14. The Nike x Kim Jones collaboration was a football-inspired collection of clothing and shoes released in June 2018.

15. *Viz* is a British comic magazine first published in 1979, known, according to its website, for its 'foul-mouthed, childish cartoons and sharp satire'. Its most celebrated characters include the Fat Slags, Buster Gonad, Sid the Sexist, and Johnny Fartpants.

16. Sir Jonathan Ive is the British chief design officer at Apple. He has been at the company since 1996, leading the team that designed the original iMac, the iPod and the iPhone. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for his 'services to design and enterprise' in 2012.

17. Hiroshi Fujiwara is a Japanese streetwear designer (notably with his label Goodenough), musician and the founder of fragment design. He has collaborated widely with brands such as Nike, Stüssy and Supreme.

18. Nigo was the founder and creative director of A Bathing Ape, one of the key Japanese streetwear brands of the 1990s and early 2000s. He was a partner alongside Fujiwara and Undercover's Jun Takahashi in the legendary store Nowhere, which opened in 1993. He also created two brands with Pharrell Williams, Billionaire Boys Club and Ice Cream. Spiralling debts forced him to sell A Bathing Ape to a Chinese company in 2011 for $2.8 million and he left the brand in April 2013. He is now the creative director for Uniqlo's UT line.

19. In late 1970s Bristol, DJ Mil'o was part of the crew that also included Nellee Hooper, who would go on to create Soul II Soul, and Grant 'Daddy G' Marshall, a founding member of Massive Attack. After Mil'o moved to London, he worked with Ray Petri's Buffalo collective, with whom he visited Tokyo, where he met Hiroshi Fujiwara. He left for New York in 1989 whence he continues to DJ.

20. Major Force was a record label set up by Hiroshi Fujiwara and Kan Takagi to release both homegrown and international hip-hop and dance music in Japan.

21. James Lavelle was actually 14 when he worked in Bluebird Records, a time when he began obsessively collecting Major Force releases. He created record label Mo'Wax with Tim Goldsworthy in 1992 and shortly after the band U.N.K.L.E.

22. The neighbourhood surrounding Akihabara Station in central Tokyo, once popularly known as Electric Town for its profusion of electronic-goods stores, is today also a centre for video games, anime and manga.

23. Seditionaries was Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren's boutique on the King's Road in London, the successor to their shop Sex. It is often considered the clothing ground zero for punk.

24. Photographer Mark Lebon was part of Ray Petri's Buffalo collective and brother of James. His work has been published in with magazines including *i-D*, *The Face*, *Arena* and *Harpers & Queen*.

25. Stylist and designer Ray Petri was the brains behind Buffalo, an informal underground, multicultural, multidisciplinary creative collective, active in London between 1984 and 1989. Members included photographers (Jamie Morgan and Cameron McVey), models (a teenage Naomi Campbell and Barry and Nick Kamen), and musicians (Neneh Cherry, whose hit 'Buffalo Stance' was a shout-out to the collective and co-written by Morgan and McVey). Petri died in 1989, but the collective's influence on contemporary fashion remains, paradoxically, both enormous and underestimated.

26. André Walker is a much-loved Brooklyn-born, self-taught designer. He opened his own label in the early 1990s, but shut it in 2001 (the year after he won the Andam prize); he has also worked as a consultant for both Kim Jones and Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton. In October 2017, he held a series of short shows during Paris Fashion Week featuring reproductions of his designs from the early 1980s.

27. Leigh Bowery – legendary figure on the 1980s club scene, promoter, designer, performance artist, artist's model – died aged 33 on New Year's Eve 1994, of AIDS-related illness.

Managing partner: Dovile Drizyte. Photographer's assistant: Karin Xiao. Casting director: Shelley Durkan. Hair stylist: Tomohiro Ohashi. Hair assistants: Joséphine Brignon, Miwa Moroki. Makeup artist: Estelle Jaillet. Makeup assistants: Odile Sidra, JinDan Yang. Manicurists: Magali Buisson, Magali Sanzey at Majeur Prod. Wardrobe assistant: Marine Blanpain. Production: Mathieu Le Denmat, Vera Massus. Talent: Lukas at IMG, Babacar N'Doye at Elite, Valentin Caron at Success, Andrew Westermann at TIAD, Lucy Beeden, Yoon Ahn, Stephen Jones, Eliot Sumner, Ellie Shaw, Matthew Williams.

Mode sans frontières

Israeli-Palestinian streetwear brand ADISH is the ultimate joint venture. By Amit Luzon. Illustration by Jean-Philippe Delhomme

To say a fashion brand like ours is working towards peace, especially when it comes to a situation like the conflict between Palestine and Israel, might sound like a stretch. At best, it could sound like vague conceptual jargon and bring to mind hollow activist slogans on T-shirts; at worst, it could sound like a marketing ploy, using a tragic state of affairs as a way for a brand to make money.

So, what do we at ADISH actually do? When my partner Eyal Eliyahu and I founded the label, we were interested in a few basic things: fashion, street culture, and the traditional crafts of the Middle East that we'd seen growing up in Israel. This alone isn't extraordinary, even if fundamentally, an Israeli simply appreciating and valuing Palestinian craft can be taken as a sign of openness, a respect for the 'other side's' traditions, that shows a desire for understanding and acceptance – and for peace.

We began what would become ADISH by figuring out how we could take contemporary streetwear shapes and apply embroidery to them, in new and innovative designs hand-stitched by Palestinians. With the help of an NGO, we were able to start working with three Palestinian women who live in the West Bank, sampling and producing items featuring their handmade embroidery. With the development of the third collection, ADISH is now working with over 50 Palestinian women who hand-embroider elements onto the garments.

A project of this scope, across a heavily fortified border and into an occupied territory, comes with its own set of hurdles. As Israelis, Eyal and I cannot travel freely to the West Bank, while the embroiderers and other Palestinian members of ADISH cannot travel freely to Israel. The factory where clothing is cut and sewn is in Israel; another is in Palestine. Getting the materials back and forth across the checkpoints and barriers is a crazy logistical circus, mostly done by taxi.

On top of all that, both sides of our team are criticized and as ADISH continues and develops, we have, of course, had to address a series of hard questions. The Israelis are accused of stealing another culture; the Palestinians are accused of being traitors, working with the occupier; and so on. So we ask ourselves: are we taking advantage of these women? Are we appropriating and capitalizing on their culture? Are we normalizing the conflict?

It's become clear to us that what we are doing isn't easy, but we believe that that difficulty is actually proof that it is important. The idea that an item of clothing is made in both Israel and Palestine – and that it wouldn't exist without both places – is so exciting for us. We know that the women we work with are doing so voluntarily; they name the price for their work and are in control of their own production systems. We also work together creatively, and a number of the designs come from the women's own families, histories and traditions. They also have Palestinian representatives at the NGO who they can speak to at any time – and sometimes do, letting us know, for example, that a deadline is too soon. It's a relationship built upon mutual respect and of that we're confident.

As the brand develops and is carried in more stores around the world, such as Opening Ceremony, Slam Jam and Antonioli, the pressure on us all is certainly growing. The women are under more pressure to produce, and so their teams continue to grow. But this pressure also means that more and more Palestinians are earning real income from ADISH, while working at something they enjoy, of which they are proud, creating things they cherish. For us, the pressure comes from the fact that women are now relying on the work we give them, and so we have to do all we can to succeed and ensure they don't lose their income.

But back to the beginning: what are we at ADISH doing to work towards peace through fashion? The most important way is simply how ADISH shows Israelis that it's OK to embrace Palestinians, and vice versa. It shows both sides that there are many on both sides willing to do it and already doing it. It shows the world that the conflict is more complicated than simply two sides against each other, black and white. It shows the world that not every Israeli and Palestinian feels the same way. In a situation where there is so much violence and hatred, we feel that ADISH, born out of respect and compassion, understanding and exchange, is resisting division. We hope it is setting an example – and so by doing so, slowly moving towards peace.

The vanishing act(ress)

How Fan Bingbing became collateral damage in a macho Chinese feud. By Hung Huang. Illustration by Jean-Philippe Delhomme

I first met Chinese actress Fan Bingbing 15 years ago at a Louis Vuitton store opening in Wenzhou. After dinner, we decided to celebrate at a karaoke bar. Although wearing sunglasses, she was recognized on her way to the private room. Men got up and followed, some tried to touch her, while her agents and the waiters did their best to protect her. Once inside our private room, we could not close the door as about five men rolled up their sleeves, stuck their arms inside and begged Bingbing to autograph their limbs. I watched the actress's face in that moment; her stoic expression and downcast eyes seemed to be refusing to acknowledge her reality. By now, the whole world knows that Fan Bingbing went missing on July 1, a scapegoat in the Chinese government's high-profile effort to clean up a supposedly morally lax entertainment industry.

The whole scandal started early this year as a fight between three powerful men: Mr. C., a TV-show host, and his friends, celebrity filmmaker Mr. F. and bestselling novelist Mr. L. Until 2002, when he quit after suffering from depression, Mr. C. was the host of *Tell It Like It Is*, one of Chinese TV's most popular shows. He says that back then he told his friends all the behind-the-scenes secrets of being a TV presenter; then, a year later, his now ex-friends released a film called *Cell Phone*. It was the story of a famous show host who has an affair with his assistant, played by Fan Bingbing. Mr. C. has apparently been holding a grudge about this betrayal and the film for the past 15 years – and in June, he finally lashed out. After hearing on social media that *Cell Phone 2* was in the works, he launched a stream-of-consciousness outburst accusing both Mr. F. and Mr. L. of betraying their friendship, taking advantage of his depression, ruining his life, scaring his daughter, causing misery for his wife, and overall, being perfect examples of immoral behaviour so prevalent in China's entertainment industry.

This caused absolutely no buzz, until Fan Bingbing posted a single tweet to say that she was happily working on *Cell Phone 2*. Mr. C. considered this a provocation and reacted by posting online two 'yin-yang contracts' that he said showed how the actress had been evading tax: the one given to the tax authorities was worth $1.5 million; the private one $7.5 million.

The official government media quickly chimed in accusing the entertainment industry of loose morals, deliberately violating government regulations and evading taxes. Everyone took this as an indictment of Fan Bingbing – who then promptly disappeared from public view. No social-media updates, no interviews, no rebuttal, no happy pictures on a film set, or a video selling cosmetics: on July 1, she simply vanished.

As time went on, the disappearance appeared more and more like detention, meaning that she was in serious trouble, and no one was going to help her. She may be powerful, she may know extremely powerful people in business and politics, but no one was speaking out in her defence. No one was going to risk that now even if (or because) all Chinese are guilty of tax evasion to some degree. The government is well aware of this, so it has periodic crackdowns. The public face of this is usually rich, famous actresses because: 1) misogyny is part of mainstream Chinese culture; 2) men control all the political power, but remain cowards so none will risk political death to defend a sex symbol; 3) making an example of the country's most famous actress shows everyone that no one is above the law. There is a Chinese saying that says: 'Kill a chicken to scare the monkeys.' In this case, Fan Bingbing is the chicken – and while she disappeared, Mr. C., Mr. F. and Mr. L. are all doing just fine. Mr. C. did actually apologize to the actress, saying that he never intended to make her collateral damage in the fight with his ex-friends, but they have remained silent.

And then Fan Bingbing reappeared, virtually at least, requesting forgiveness on her social-media account: 'Without the good policies of the party and the state, and without the love of the people, there would be no Fan Bingbing.' She will not, as a first-time offender, face any criminal charges as long as she pays RMB 883 million (US$129 million) in fines for tax evasion and other offences. At the time of writing, however, Fan Bingbing has still not been seen.

Opinionwear

Why the EUnify hoodie is a both symbol of unrest and a call to action. By Johann König. Illustration by Jean-Philippe Delhomme

The Treaty of Rome – which laid the foundation for today's European Union – was signed on March 25, 1957. On the same day 60 years later, we held an event at my gallery in Berlin, to celebrate the anniversary of this historic achievement and raise awareness, especially among the younger generation, of the benefits of a union of peace. At the event, Wolfgang Tillmans relaunched his anti-Brexit poster campaign, this time for the EU's anniversary and the elections in the Netherlands, France and Germany. He called himself a child of the EU, as it was the Union that had made it possible for him to study in the UK.

I am 37 now, and I still remember our holiday journeys being interrupted by border controls. So we wanted to make clear that nothing can be taken for granted, and that in these times, we all must raise our voice and stand up for what we believe in. Over the past several years, it has seemed that fewer and fewer citizens identify with the Union, at the same time as it has become ever-more important to emphasize a shared European identity – a process of 'Europeanization' or the conscious shift from a national to a continental identity. Because that is perhaps the only thing that can help stem the current nationalist tide and chart the future of the European Union itself.

The EUnify project had started a few months earlier, in 2016, at the beginning of advent, that four-week countdown to Christmas when houses are dressed in colourful lights. My gallery is situated in St. Agnes, a Brutalist deconsecrated church in Kreuzberg, the geographical centre of Berlin. For some reason, Christmas lighting is extremely popular in this relatively forgotten neighbourhood of 1950s West Berlin social-housing projects. Shortly before the holiday season, Chris Dercon – at that time still the director of Tate Modern – connected me to architectural group morePlatz, which wanted to make a strong pro-European statement and needed partners. The result – a light installation spelling 'EUROPA' mounted like Christmas lights on the former church's facade – fitted right in.

That early winter in 2016 was particularly cold and dark; Trump had just won the election, and the UK had voted in favour of Brexit five months earlier. It was imperative that we did not leave the field to pessimists, particularly as the election in the Netherlands had recently seen politics take a shift to the right, and the French elections in May 2017 weren't looking good. Europe was approaching a turning point. The whole point of our 60th-anniversary event was to make people see the positives of the European project, particularly with the young.

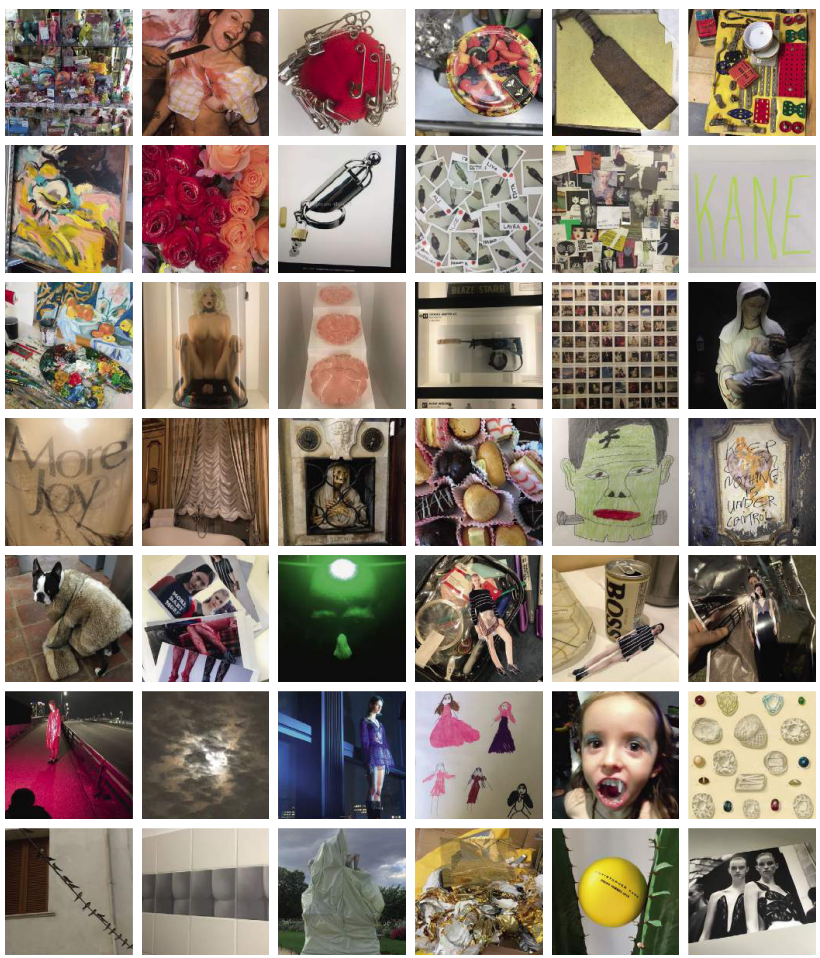
So my label, König Souvenir, produced the EUnify hoodie, portable 'opinionwear' that continues to spread our message beyond the event. In a time of seemingly impossible election results, social division and climate crisis, the hoodie became both a symbol of unrest and a call to action for young people everywhere. It has been accompanied by events and media campaigns that raise awareness not only of the European project, but of alliances for peace around the world. On the front, the EU's emblematic circle of stars, has been broken and 1 of the 12 has lost its way and moved to the back, where it sits next to the number of the EU hotline. The design both reflects the feeling of uncertainty that has beset the EU after the British referendum and marks the beginning of a countermovement in search of more collaboration and unity.

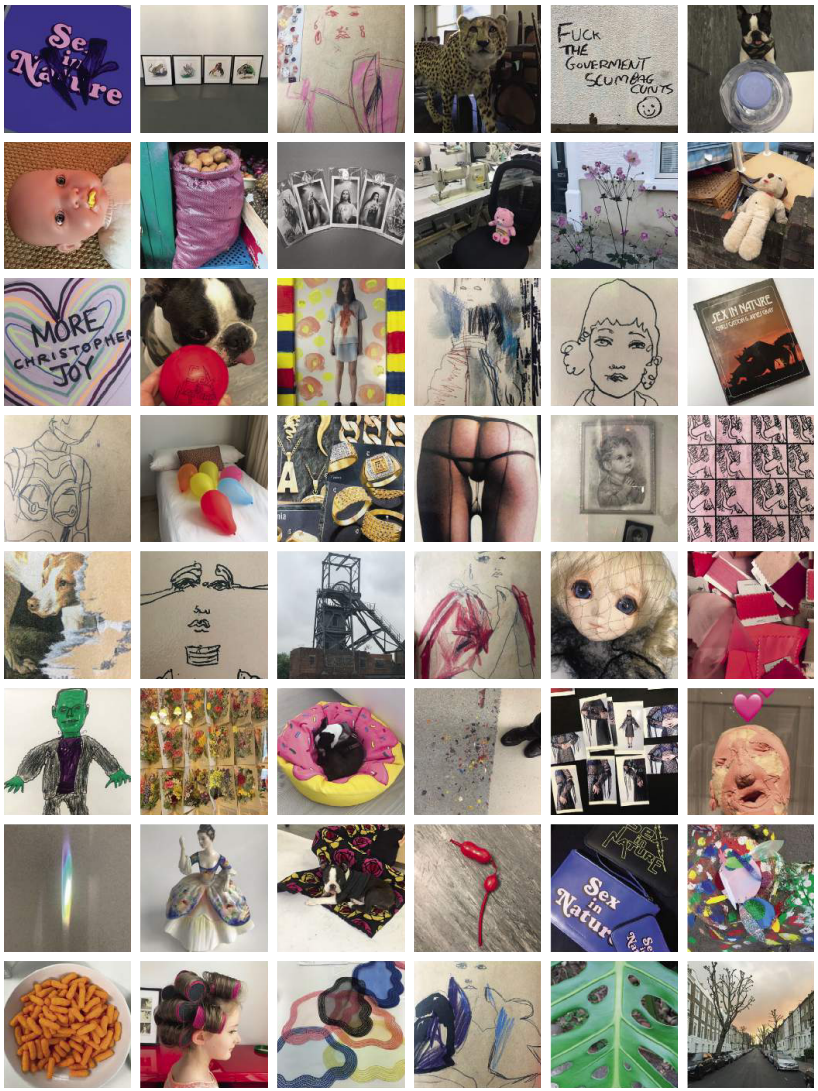
The EUnify hoodie – a tool for political activation and unification – has gained a lot of attention. We have launched a couple of other 'message' products, including the Solidarity Hoodie – in collaboration with Frankfurt-based collective IGNAZ – which targets intolerance, hatred and anti-Semitism in our society. With a kippa stitched on the hood to symbolize freedom of worship and tolerance, it stands for social unity and celebrates our pluralistic and multicultural society.

My aim with König Souvenir is to make it possible for a wide audience to relate to the artistic programme and all that surrounds it outside the constraints of the gallery walls. Many of the projects directly engage with current social and political issues, with the support of well-known creative figures such as Juergen Teller and Virgil Abloh. For the next König Souvenir, we have teamed up with the Sucuk und Bratwurst studio for a new campaign: to finally, once and for all, free the nipple!

Camera roll

By Christopher Kane





‘We’re an underground American brand being mainstream.’

Long before there was ‘diversity’, ‘community’ or ‘non-binary’, there was Telfar Clemens.

Interview by Hans Ulrich Obrist
Photographs by Roe Ethridge
Styling by Avena Gallagher
Creative direction by Babak Radboy

Back in 2005, long before 'diversity', 'community' or 'non-binary' were buzzwords and three years before the United States had elected its first black president, a young man named Telfar Clemens founded a label to make non-racial, non-gendered fashion. For over a decade, he produced his original, unique and groundbreaking clothing of repurposed classics and twisted basics, and for over a decade, much of the fashion press – *System* included – simply ignored him. In 2017, Telfar won the *Vogue*/CFDA Fashion Fund and they (we) had to take notice. Today, after years of running his own show at his own pace, the rest of the world has caught up with Telfar Clemens and his 'horizontal, democratic, universal' fashion.

Because Telfar really *is* its own thing, a label that effortlessly crosses the borders between art and fashion, while creating both. It is the vision of a designer who believes in collaboration, in working together with a constant group of creative friends and acquaintances, people like designer Shayne Oliver, artists Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, and, perhaps most importantly, Babak Radboy, now the label's creative director.

Since Clemens and Radboy began working together, they have been refining and redefining Telfar's position and image, building a real business through thrilling clothes, unexpected initiatives and pioneering collaborations. They've worked with big-box retailer Kmart; they've redesigned and produced the uniforms for US fast-food chain White Castle; and they've brought art and fashion together in seasonal presentations at venues including White Box, the New Museum and London's Serpentine Gallery. Their latest initiative, the *Telfar World Tour* is fashion presentation as concert, a touring show featuring the clothes on muses, singers and models. Held off-season and sometimes off the fashion grid, the concerts are symbols of the brand's attempts to reach new audiences and live up to its slogan: 'It's not for you – it's for everyone.'

The unisex clothes themselves are both quietly radical and deeply American. A child of the 1990s, Clemens grew up with labels such as Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren and their signifier-only, idealized vision of what it meant to be and dress 'American'. That WASPy, exclusively inclusive casual elegance was then reappropriated and transformed into something entirely different by black America. Clemens has taken both these oddly intertwining inheritances and appropriated them differently again as part of an ambition to become the era-defining version of 21st-century American fashion, to create something that is uniquely him and absolutely now.

This summer, the Serpentine Gallery's Artistic Director Hans Ulrich Obrist sat down with Telfar Clemens and Babak Radboy in New York to discuss where it all began, how the brand manages to operate both inside and outside the system, and why the Telfar brand really isn't inclusive.

Can you tell me about how Telfar started back in 2005? What kind of clothes did you make in the very beginning?
Telfar: Basically, I'd buy three T-shirts from Orchard Street and I would put them together in a way that meant you could wear three T-shirts at once. Those were the first pieces.

So three people could wear it?
Telfar: It was one T-shirt, but two people could wear it at the same time and in different ways. At that time the big white T-shirt trend was in, and everyone was wearing oversized T-shirts. Mine was a bit like that, but a little inverted. So, it still looked as though you were part of that crew. But then it was like, Wait, why does yours have the sleeve all the way over there, and there's a hole here? That was the first thing I was making, and I realized people were buying it, and I was selling out. That's when I started selling through *Vice* magazine. They had a store and a friend of mine worked there. They would always have these cool parties – *Vice* was still cool at that time – and they were the first to invest in the line. They gave me the first show I did, and I dressed the entire House of Ninja.[1]

In which year did the first show take place?
Telfar: This was in 2004, when we did the *Vice Is Burning* show.

Before we talk about the shows, tell me who your hero and heroine designers were.
Telfar: The designers who made me want to switch a tag?[2] I would get a lot of Vivienne Westwood. I would go to the European women's designers section at Century 21[3] and just look through literally everything. I would look at the seams, anything that looked cool, things I didn't understand. I was able to get stuff for one night and then I'd return it the next day and get something else. I would get a lot of Comme des Garçons and at that time, Helmut Lang was… well, that was what you went to Century 21 for. There were things I wanted to make or that I aspired to make, and there were things that didn't exist for me. I got to experience both through shopping.

The *Vice Is Burning* show was in 2004?
Telfar: It was a riff on the movie *Paris Is Burning*[4] that *Vice* was doing. It wasn't a solo show, but after that, I got different opportunities to do new things. The best thing that came out of it was that I developed a friendship with Willi Ninja, who at that time was running a modelling agency. He was just driving around in a minivan with all these models in the back; he was sweet and cool and liked my clothes. Then shortly after the show he died.[5] That show was the beginning. After that I really got a lot of opportunities to show my work through the art world.

More and more architects and designers are finding a way in through the art world, because it is so open.
Telfar: It's like a vector in other directions. People appreciated the stuff that I was doing. We had a good community of people who also had resources, and it was like: OK, this gallery should let you show your video here and have a party. I was doing a lot of things in video form. Jaiko Suzuki[6] would have this party, Tokyo Mon Amour, that everyone met everyone else at. She's a musician and she would make all these Super 8 films of all the kids around at that time.

From the beginning it had a lot to do with collaboration, with lots of different people, including Ninja. How did he inspire you? What did you learn from him?
Telfar: He was a legend. He started a lot of things, but he was also chilled and well respected. He was never too cool to know certain people; he really knew everybody.

He and these kids were driving around in his van?
Telfar: Yeah, it was all these models and he was like: when you have a show, you should book her and her and her. He was always trying to put something on.

So House of Ninja was both a dance company and a model agency?
Telfar: I think he did a lot of different things! He was putting on and producing shows. I didn't know he was unwell.

And who were your other fashion influences?
Telfar: Yohji Yamamoto. Jean Paul Gaultier is one of my favourite designers, but I also love International Male.[7] I like everything, really. I have learned not to say I don't like anything, because it all might come in useful for what I design, in my sort of repurposing.

You have an infinite curiosity?
Telfar: Yes, if it has a genre, I want to add my two cents to that genre and take it somewhere else. That is how I like clothes; there isn't a colour or shoe I don't like. I see things I don't like as a challenge.

So there is this show with *Vice*, which is a beginning, and then in 2005, you start the label.
Telfar: Yes, that was when I began making things with my own fabrics. Basically, *Vice* ordered a bunch of T-shirts and I invested that money into making a new collection. People were not taking me seriously; I was going to shops – I was maybe 18 – and just showing them stuff. I was very tough. I'd say: 'Look through these things, try them on.' But they were all like: 'You should really try and get on the seasonal calendar, and have a lookbook and a line sheet, instead of just walking in here with a pile of clothes.' But that was how I started to work, making stuff, and that became a reason to do a show.

Tell us about your first solo show.
Telfar: It was in the same vein; I did three shows based on club nights. I used to hang out at South Park, a club in Brooklyn, so I did the show there, which was all lesbians and voguing. Everything was a twist on what you thought it was – like, you thought they were boys, but they were girls. After that, I used club nights and videos I was doing. That's how I was presenting things.

Telfar's slogan is: 'It's not for you – it's for everyone.' When and how did that come about?
Telfar: Around the Berlin Biennale.[8]
Babak Radboy: It was before that,

'Basically, I'd buy three T-shirts from Orchard Street and I would put them together in a way that meant you could wear three T-shirts at once.'

'I have learned not to say I don't like anything, because it all might come in useful for what I design, in my sort of repurposing.'

around *Mainstream Fluid*,[9] which was our first collection that represented the brand as we wanted it to be.
Telfar: We were playing around with this idea of an underground brand being mainstream.
Babak: Our first slogan was 'It's Extremely Normal'; that was in 2013. We changed it because of normcore. Everyone was like, 'Oh, that normcore brand', and then we got closer to the essence of what we were trying to say – a reaction against that type of hyper-marketed 'identitarian' clothing.

Against classification, in a way?
Telfar: In a way. That is the point of my brand in the first place. I wasn't allowed to wear certain things that I now get a kick out of wearing – I don't need anyone to tell me that that is fine. You choose for yourself.
Babak: That is why the brand has no gender. It doesn't subscribe to any bourgeois categories of taste. We think of fashion as an applied art, such as painting, but its first purpose is to separate people between who owns the house and who paints the house.

Of course, the mainstream fashion industry didn't get that to begin with. You were too modern for them. Do you think that it was a form of discrimination, in a way?
Telfar: It was menswear showing in women's week and journalists were like, 'No, my editor would never write about that', and, 'Oh my god, someone was wearing a backless shirt and everyone was moving towards the most normal, disgusting clothes'. American fashion was turning into celebrity fashion and it was the beginning of the *Us Weekly* era:[10] you needed Paris Hilton to wear it before anyone would write about it and consider it fashion. That is what it was like. Other guys were there, and they'd say, 'That was the best thing I saw this week, but I can't write about it', or they would make references but without mentioning my name.

As well as the fact it is genderless, you also anticipated the now-common fluidity between art and fashion.
Telfar: That's what made me think later on that the art world was the way out, to make money and be the designer I wanted to be. I quickly got out of that. It is thanks to Ryan Trecartin.[11] We've worked on so much cool stuff together and we seamlessly connected.

When did you meet Ryan?
Telfar: In 2004, in New Orleans.

You know, Ryan is the reason I started social media.
Telfar: Really?
Five years ago, I was having breakfast at his house in LA with him and Kevin McGarry,[12] and he just took my phone and downloaded Instagram. He had a lot of photos because he had got an early start on it, and then he told all his followers that I had joined Instagram.
Telfar: He actually introduced me to Instagram, too, because I was... I am still not on it, really.

I got quickly addicted.
Telfar: I look at it all the time, but I just don't post anything. I don't want anyone to know.

It is more than a collaboration with Ryan; it's also a friendship.
Telfar: We've been having fun! When I met Ryan, I had always been doing what I was doing. He was in New Orleans, then Katrina[13] happened and he moved to Philly and started working on his movies there. I can't really tell you how Ryan's process works. He would write things for days, and then you would be on set and the script would be out the window because something else would happen, like, 'Drive this car into the stream!'
Babak: Telfar played different characters in all those films; it was really fun.

Did you do the clothes, too?
Telfar: No, I didn't do any of the clothes. We would go to Kmart and Lizzie Fitch[14] would style everything. Doing that actually inspired a lot of things, because we would get the most horrible clothes from every walk of life and later I started to adapt them. We would dress up in cool things and tape stuff.
Babak: Then they did some installations with you.
Telfar: The first time I worked with Ryan, I went to LA and I wanted to do a show that was based on a surreal situation that would then be the lookbook. I've always wanted to work in a commercial way and make a beautiful art piece, and I wanted the show to be both a showroom and an art piece. That is how we started showing things. It would be an installation or a shop that Lizzie Fitch would construct or a video with Ryan. I started to create installations and that is how I started to work with New Galerie.[15] They began to produce new art pieces and then I did a video game with Ryan, too.

Tell me about that.
Telfar: The video game was called *TELFAR Style*. It had a really cool early Internet look and it let you do the styling yourself. We made it with a Lizzie Fitch mannequin as the avatar and you could style all the looks. Then we picked the winning looks, styled by people from all over the world, and those were the ones I showed on the runway. It was a two-month process, at a time when my styling crew was not around, and I thought it would be really cool if it was styled using the computer. People could pick the colours of all the looks, and we dyed the clothes for the winning looks. Things started off all white at the gallery and you could pick the colour and the style. It was a really cool group of winners, and they got to see the runway show, which happened during a blizzard.[16]
Babak: That was the show when I decided I wanted to work with Telfar. I have to say though that everything you just described was basically crowdsourcing before the word crowdsourcing existed. It was 'see now, buy now', before *that* was a thing. These things were done for fun and with total impiety towards what separates fashion and commerce and art. That's now become totally normalised for all the big brands.
Telfar: I've always wanted my stuff to be a complete contrast to whatever fashion people think is fashionable. I want to be as far away from that as possible. I cannot stand what people consider to be cool. I want to go *this* way when everyone else is going *that* way.

So, a certain contrariness?
Telfar: Yes, I love to be really confusing and converse to everyone else.

Confusing can be interesting. There is actually some literature about 'simplexity', which Wikipedia says is 'an emerging theory that proposes a possible complementary relationship between complexity and simplicity'.
Babak: Isn't that also a sexually transmitted disease?[17] [Laughs] There were a lot of things about language in the collections too; we wanted it to be hybrid, to have secret meanings.

You anticipated this now-common idea of participation, like involving the customers in what you put in the stores. Can you tell me about that? Was that idea there from the beginning?
Telfar: We've been a different brand since the beginning. We are not going to sell things in the same way as other brands; we have different customers. We are selling things to people like me who don't buy anything. We are trying to think how people actually think.
Babak: A lot of the people who love the brand do not follow fashion at all; they are art people. They don't buy anything, not even this brand – which is really annoying! We are having to teach them how to shop…
Telfar: …for clothes that essentially don't exist. Plus, for some pieces you cannot find anything else like them anywhere – not yet anyway – so people don't even know how to put them on. That's why a video or any kind of interaction with the clothes is so important. It's just not enough to see them on a hanger because you won't know what they are. I want stuff to look really normal on a rack, but completely different on your body.

There have been other people who have been instrumental in your work. Kelela,[18] for example.
Telfar: She is one of my best friends, one of last season's musical collaborators, and a muse who I dress. Then there's DIS Magazine,[19] which since the beginning, has been the only platform that would write anything about what I was doing. No one was covering it, so that was like the only way to see the stuff back then. Other people… well, there's Babak, of course, and Avena Gallagher;[20] she's a stylist.
Babak: She's my partner; she started before I did with Telfar.

What's her role in the mix?
Telfar: She refines and understands my design situation; she knows what is not me, what would look better. She is the guiding voice who understands me because she has been there and seen what I've done before. She styled my first show, which was different variations of sweatsuits in different fabrics. I don't think there were even any shoes. Avena understands what goes on in New York and what goes on in Europe, and what actually makes sense. We understand a lot of different things; literally, she is the tiebreaker between me and Babak.

And then what about Kelela?
Telfar: Kelela… I mean, she's my boo. It is really hard to dress a celebrity or a performer, but she is the one person

'I cannot stand what people consider to be cool. I always want to go this way when everyone else is trying to go that way.'

'A lot of the people who love Telfar don't follow fashion at all. They don't buy anything, not even this brand. We have to teach them how to shop...'

who makes sense. My clothes just look so good on her; her vibe is just so over the moon. Seeing her grow and become the pop star she has become has been really cool. When people see her they think about me, too.

Babak: The celebrity thing is tricky because for us. When something is original and doesn't follow a trend, it becomes difficult for people to want it. They want, for the most part, something they have already seen. They want to be adjacent to someone fabulous and model themselves on that person. Even celebrities want to be adjacent to another celebrity. And Kelela, from the beginning was just like, 'No, I like *that*'. She absolutely chooses to wear it.

Telfar: I met her in 2012 or 2013 through all the music kids in LA; they were like, 'There's this girl from Maryland who you should really meet'. Going back, we actually knew the same people. My cousins grew up with her; she went to school with them and knows them well. There is a lot of crossover. We were just hanging out together over Thanksgiving and going back though our childhood and realized that we were right across the street but didn't actually know each other.

There are also other people of your own generation. People like Shayne Oliver[21] whom I've also interviewed…

Telfar: Shayne is like my first boyfriend, best friend; he walked my first real show. He has always been around. The first time I learned about what an operations manager is and why you need these things to make a business work, it was with him. I always thought I was a one-man army, that I could do things from a basement, and that things would just work out. He showed me that you need to build a team. Shayne and Leilah Weinraub[22] at Hood by Air built this infrastructure so that I wouldn't make the same mistakes they made. I learned how things work and don't work. They really just taught me a lot of how an untraditional business can work.

And Raul Lopez?[23]

Telfar: I have known him for as long as Shayne, basically from hanging out on the street. He is always busy. He has his own line and he works for other people. I think he is going to be the next New York fashion business. He is the coolest and most established young designer coming up right now. There's also Fatima Al Qadiri;[24] she's one of my big musical collaborators.

I did an interview with Fatima and her sister Monira…

Telfar: I just met them in Dubai.

They are so amazing together.

Telfar: They are like the same person, and you can see where it comes from when you meet their mom.

She is great.

Telfar: I was supposed to go to Kuwait because she wanted to do a painting of me. We had a really great time in Dubai.

What is the role of DJing in all this?

Telfar: It's for the money!

When did you start?

Telfar: Probably in 2006.

Let's talk about the DJing. Who were your heroes and how would you describe your style?

Telfar: I have been blessed by not having to do anything I don't like doing. So even though I've said I don't like to DJ now, that's not 100% true; I do. It's just I don't like doing it on a weekly basis; I like to do it for fun. I used to have four club nights a week; that's how I paid for the collection and could still go to school, as well as network and have meetings. I would meet people at two in the morning and then go home and do whatever I had to do. But I would go to school at six in the morning having DJed until four. And that was basically how things worked. I would DJ at the Cock,[25] which was on Second Avenue. After a while I hated it, though. As much as I love the community, I don't need to be out every night any more. I'm at a different point in my life now.

'I used to DJ four club nights a week; that's how I paid for the collection and could still go to school, as well as network and have meetings.'

Let's talk about the legendary runway shows. You work on them together, so I wanted to ask you both about your favourite shows.

Telfar: The show that Shayne was in with 2006 Gen Art was pretty cute. Afterwards, the installations and exhibitions with Ryan were good.

Any in particular?

Telfar: In 2011, we did something at White Box, a gallery on the Lower East Side. They made me sets and we had beds and these beaten-up mannequins from American Apparel, and that was how we displayed the clothes. Then there was the *Shop Mobile* in 2013, which Lizzie Fitch built, and that basically lasted for two seasons. I would make installations and put the new clothes in this shop that she built for me and which could travel all around. The video we made for Spring/Summer 2014 was the first thing Babak and I did together…

Babak: I love that *TELFAR Style* show when it was styled from the game. It was something about seeing that show and the fact that there were no press or buyers, just our friends. I loved the show, but it also made me really mad and it made me want to work together. The idea of working together was like: 'How do you take this thing that you are doing and turn it into a brand? And how do you make that brand as weird in its own way as the thing that you are doing?'

Telfar: We are done with a collection about three months before the show, and then we work on video and the assets that are going to sell it. It's making sense of what the fuck we've made. We shoot a lookbook of the clothes, then we make a video of the clothes, and then we make a T-shirt of the stuff that goes into the runway collection.

Babak: It's the exact opposite of normal fashion. We do the campaign before the show and then the show is the campaign for the collection. At *Mainstream Fluidities*, the Spring/Summer 2014 show, there was a 20-foot video screen that I had convinced someone in Texas to give me for free. You saw a model on the video screen wearing one look and then the real person came walking out from behind it, so there was kind of a time warp; 30 looks, 30 people, no changes.

Telfar: We had 30 other models coming out wearing T-shirts of the models who had just come out before them. It kind of went over people's heads, but it was all based on this idea of fast merchandising. Where you could buy a T-shirt with a look printed on it because you loved it so much. Like, 'I love look 22, so I'll buy the T-shirt showing it and then I'm out of the door'. And we got our money and didn't go broke after doing that show. That's when we wanted to start having shows like we are having right now.

Babak: We also know that people aren't always ready for these clothes, even if they like them. So they buy a picture of the clothes to show they like them without having to risk wearing them.

A T-shirt in that sense is almost like a…

Babak: A lookbook.

So you started with T-shirts and then that never really went away.

Telfar: No, it never went away. I love a T-shirt, in all its different forms. It was also about using the most accessible piece. I mean, if you have two arms and a neck, then you can wear one.

It is democratic.

Telfar: Also, we were creating a part of the collection that we thought was going to make money. Because there was, and still is, a two-year period between when I design and make something, and when people desire and want it.

So, you are always too early?

Telfar: Two years too early, although maybe now we are like 18 months too early.

Babak: That was the other thing that convinced me I wanted to work with Telfar. I would do little things for him and he would pay me with clothes, and I would always find I was looking in the collections that were two years old and asking for that. He would say, 'Why?' and I was like, 'Because you are so ahead!'

Music plays a big role in these shows, like in Spring/Summer 2014.

Babak: That was a music video.

Who made it?

Telfar: Future Brown, a group formed by Fatima Al Qadiri, J-Cush, Asma Maroof and Daniel Pineda.[26] Their first video was our lookbook.

Telfar: They were debuting this brand-new song. What was it called again?

Babak: 'Marbles.'[27] The crazy thing about the video is that it was also the last year that Facebook was chronological,[28] before the new algorithm came out, so we were able to get more views than a Gucci video; we got 200,000 views in a couple of days.

'The collection's completed three months before the show. So we work on video assets that are going to sell it – making sense of what the fuck we've made.'

What was the next show after that?

Telfar: Our massive show at the New Museum;[29] we treated it like an amusement park or a concert. We created a store inspired by Kmart, and then Kmart ended up working with us. It was the same season we introduced the Telfar bag, so we had this shop full of brand-new bags, which you could buy right on the spot, and the runway show was upstairs. We actually shot the lookbook and made a video, like we'd done the time before, but we made these little 3D-printed action figures of all the looks.[30] We thought people would come

downstairs and buy the action figure of the look they wanted, but most people stole them. Even our friends stole them, and all the models stole their own!
Babak: It was like an expo. The idea at that point was to create this profusion of different representations – the little version, the T-shirt version. Instead of an underground feeling, we wanted it to be as mainstream as possible.
Telfar: Without losing money!
Babak: It became the way we made money. That's why that show was so important – it created the new model of how we could exist.

That was in New Museum and then…
Telfar: After that we were like, 'We are never doing that scale of show again!'

What came after the museum?
Babak: It was the acoustic show, Spring/Summer 2015.
Telfar: Oh my god, yes! That was the season we didn't know if we were going to be able to do a show up until the morning itself. I think that was my favourite.
Babak: It was beautiful.
Telfar: The rug had been just pulled out from under us and we just winged it, literally. All we had was a piano and chairs, not even lighting, and that was all we could afford. That was the most beautiful show ever.

Can you describe what happened? Who played the piano?
Telfar: Nathan Whipple, he is part of Hairbone;[31] we've known him forever. I was inspired by Christmas at the mall, how they play Christmas music on a piano and I thought: 'I want to hear everything disgusting that we've heard on Fire Island.' We wanted to hear Taylor Swift, Maroon 5, Lana Del Rey, just the worst songs, but played by Nathan on a piano, which made them completely different. It was also about our understanding of what is gross, commercial, and our niche – how that is us actually and that's what pop art is. That was the one collection in which we understood so many different things.

The shows vary widely, but there are certain leitmotifs in the clothes. One has been there from the beginning, from that first three-T-shirts-in-one: the work plays with deconstruction and reconstruction. In the past you've talked about taking a top and making it a sweatshirt, turning a dress into a T-shirt, leggings and so on. You seem to enjoy pulling things apart and then recombining them.
Telfar: I like to make something that is completely new, yet also sort of understandable. Like a tank top that is a tank top, but not doing the normal thing a tank top does. So it is deconstruction that adds functionality to something.
Babak: It is close to deconstruction and appropriation, but it is also not those things. The reason why is because the philosophy and subjective position of why it is being done – even if it's the same action Margiela might have taken – is producing something different. Rather than fashion, it is producing a *construction*, something always at work. The process has more in common with Pierre Cardin and Rudi Gernreich,[32] but using the same methodology of removing, repurposing and combining.
Telfar: And also just reshaping things. I see clothes when I'm biking around and I am flying by someone, and if I see someone wearing something weird, then that gives me an idea. Like when I made a shoe. I had seen every office lady in a ballet flat and I thought it would look good on me, so I made a shoe inspired by that style. I didn't deconstruct it; I just repurposed it, so it became a man's sneaker based on a ballet flat. It is a basic shoe that will never go out of style. That is how I think about stuff. My take on this shoe is that this was a woman's style in the early 2000s, and now in the 20-teens, it's become a men's shoe to wear with skinny jeans.

There is an interesting paper called 'Steps Toward the Writing of a "Compositionist Manifesto"' by Bruno Latour.[33] It seems quite you. [Reading from his phone] 'In this paper, written in the outmoded style of a "manifesto", an attempt is made to use the word "composition" as an alternative to critique and "compositionism" as an alternative to modernism. The idea is that once the two organizing principles of nature and society are gone, one of the remaining solutions is to "compose" the common world. Such a position allows an alternative view of the strange connection of modernity with the arrow of time...'
Babak: That is what we have been doing. For the past year or so, we've been partially moving away from a more nomadic and representational model towards something that was more about presence and making an alternative world. It's not irony, it's not critique, and it is not discourse or conversation. It's just about beginning to build other avenues, and that is what our shows and the entire strategy of the company are about now.

'We are both political refugees; we are both afraid of voting. We just are trying to live the way we want to live.'

But it is also political…
Telfar: It is political just because of the type of people we are. We just want to be free, it's the fact that…
Babak: It's the fact that it is fucking ridiculously hard and that it is not of our choosing.
Telfar: We just are trying to live the way we want to live. I try not to be political. I don't want to be; I'm not really that person. I don't say much about politics; I do what I need to do for me and my family. I don't care.
Babak: We are both political refugees; we are both afraid of voting.
Telfar: My parents were like, 'You mind your business and you do what you need for you, and that is all that matters'. I don't have any attachment to having to participate in certain things.

For the first five years of your life, you lived in Liberia.
Telfar: I was born here in Queens, moved to Liberia, and then the war happened, and we moved back to Queens.

Which war was that?
Telfar: The Liberian civil war.[34] I came back here when I was five, in 1991.

And you came here as a political refugee of…
Babak: The revolution in Iran, but in 1986. My father was the mayor of his town after the revolution, and he was a guerrilla for 15 years before the revolution. We left, not because we were with the shah; my father was part of the revolution. He was just a Marxist, not a violent actor.

It's interesting that you are both political refugees.
Telfar: We are similar in lots of ways, when we see where we are in America now.
Babak: We have a different subjective position. There is a weird way in how we especially don't fit into the art world, and its discourse.
Telfar: Or the fashion world either. We don't particularly fit into a lot of places – and I'm not even really trying any more.
Babak: Neither of us functions by using taste to mediate our process. We are against taste.

But you never wrote a manifesto about that?
Telfar: No, because I don't particularly want anyone to know; I am cool with it. At the same time, I am always going out the back door when it comes to good taste.

Back to the shows. Are there any others we should mention?
Telfar: Yes, our last show[35] – I couldn't believe it. The next day I was walking around and thinking: 'Is this how celebrities feel?' Because people were saying: 'That was the best show, man!' It was really cool to mix things up that much and really gross some of our friends out.

It was a concert?
Babak: Just a concert.

Who was playing?
Telfar: Kelela, Kelsey Lu…
Babak: We had an idea about how to create collective music. We knew we needed to work with musicians, and we had to leave the vector of fashion as a distribution point, and move to the vector of music as a distribution point. I actually got that idea from an Arthur Jafa[36] quote, where he explained how he wants to make a black cinema that's like black music, because black music makes money. Black music allows you to carry out your vision whereas cinema doesn't, like fashion doesn't. You need at least $2 million to even start a ready-to-wear company. You are faking it until you have that. So we wanted to work with musicians, but then make something completely synthetic that revealed a kind of music that sat outside the commodified form of music, in the same way that the clothes we are making are essentially about something collectively owned, which is style itself. So everybody solos and does background, and then the music you end up with is something that everyone does together in relationship to us – a sort of gospel song.

'You need at least $2 million to even think about starting a ready-to-wear company. You are faking it until you have that.'

So there were no models?
Telfar: There were models, because Alton Mason[37] is a model, but he can sing! We turned him into a singer. It was a new avenue for people.

Tell me about the models you do use.
Telfar: We aren't trying for diversity. Not everyone needs to be in fashion.
Babak: This is an outside narrative that gets put on us, and we just use it where

it is useful. When people call our show inclusive, I'm like: inclusive of what? We are brown, it is not inclusive! It is just people who we think look good. We've started using the word non-racial instead of inclusive or diverse. It is a non-racial, non-gendered show. We never heard any news about how racist the industry was, and now we just get a lot of news about how diverse it is. So, when was the change?

Telfar: I don't remember the change and I don't need that. I don't need someone being like: 'Oh, because you are black, I will buy that bag.' Buy it because it is good! You are actually being more racist and retarded if you think like that. It's cool if you buy it, but if you do it out of pity, pay more for it!

Babak: Before, no one would write about Telfar's clothes, and now they write about him as the 'black designer'. They write about his community and his this and his that. But the reality is that that 'community' thing is the way that black art always gets spoken about.

Telfar: It is also just so popular and PC to think like that. To think that it is helping the situation, and I am like, no, it's not.

Babak: The reason we talk about money so much is because that is what's helping. If there is no money, no transfer of funds and power and security, then I don't care how many people appear in your runway show. Who owns your company? We get annoyed when a big mainstream company does a non-gender fashion show with models of colour because we're thinking, 'Those are our customers, why don't you sell to *your* customers?'

Let's talk about your partnership with White Castle.[38] You've said that you grew up on White Castle, that it was the first restaurant you can remember when you came back from Liberia to the United States.

Telfar: The one I knew from growing up was on Queens Boulevard and 57th Avenue.[39] My mom used to work in Queens Center Mall nearby, and we would go over to White Castle to get the small burgers on Saturdays. That was my first experience. It was literally the smallest burger you could get. Then later, coming back from the club, we'd go at 4am or 6am because it was the only place open. We were introduced to the guys at White Castle with the idea of sponsorship, and we threw a party with them.

Babak: A couple of days before the show they asked: 'Do you want to do an after-party in our restaurant?' And I replied: 'Is that legal?' And they said: 'Yeah, sure, no problem.' It's not like any normal sponsorship relationship. The vice president of White Castle[40] came to the show and the party, and he was this completely unexpected person. They are a family-owned company, and we feel like we have an uncle now.

Telfar: He was the one doing the lighting at the party!

Babak: He was turning the lighting on and off to create disco lighting!

Telfar: It was just an Internet sensation after we did that. People couldn't believe we did it. Before it happened, people had been scared to come because they thought the police were going to come, but none of those things happened.

Babak: It was the best party ever.

Telfar: So many people were mad they didn't come because they thought it was just another fashion week after-party.

Babak: Because they went to the Wolfgang Tillmans thing.

Telfar: [Laughs] Bad luck! We did it again the season after, and that was a mob scene, crazy.

Babak: It started the whole downmarket trend in fashion, like collaborating with Hooters, Porn Hub and Trojan condoms. But the reason we did it was because we couldn't get fashion sponsors! No make-up or hair, nothing.

Telfar: Any sponsors were like: 'OK, so you're a doing a men's show, and who is in that? Any celebrities?' All the rules that we actually subscribe to as a brand just don't go with fashion sponsorship.

Babak: And that is why we did Kmart.

Telfar: Things that other people wouldn't touch, that fashion people wouldn't touch.

Then it became a trend.

Babak: It was an idea about how we love lower-working-class brands. We love American Eagle[41]...

Can you talk about the uniform you've designed for White Castle?

Telfar: During my entire education, I was running away from wearing a uniform. All my other brothers went to private school and I went to public school specifically to wear the clothes I wanted to wear. I think we first suggested making White Castle's uniform for them.

Babak: The amazing thing about what happened is that it's not just a sponsorship deal – we actually *make* the uniforms. So we are now delivering 50,000 units a year to White Castle.

And do other people want to buy the uniform?

Telfar: Yes, but we are keeping it so that if you want one, you have to get a job at White Castle! Our friends have them. But we are also releasing some things that you can buy at the locations. We are making a Fall one for them at the moment; it's a whole new income stream, designing uniforms.

And what about Rikers Island?

Telfar: Yes, that was the RFK bail fund[42] that we partnered with to release the capsule collection.[43] Babak found it.

So that was a social project?

Babak: We had this project with White Castle and then realized that we couldn't have our friends sing at a launch show if a corporation was going to make money from it, so we decided that 100% of the proceeds would go to charity. But we didn't know which one. A charity is what is going to fix things, but the bail fund was different…

Telfar: While we were trying to put out the work that we did, we began to see the importance of that charity. The idea was to have this party in LeFrak City,[44] in the White Castle I had always gone to, and have these performers like Noreaga do something in the neighbourhood. But the idea got shut down – even though we did have permits.

Babak: The day after we sent out the invitations and announced that the money was going to help get minors out of Rikers Island, we heard that the police held an emergency meeting; the borough chief, the anti-terrorism, anti-drug, the hip-hop units.[45] Twenty people in this room and even though we had all our permits, they shut down the party. They said it was impossible to do that party at that location.

So it was a form of censorship?

Telfar: It was a lot of different things.

Babak: Imagine the time, the heart, the six months of development we lost. The sponsors pulled out and we lost money, and it became real. First of all, we chose the charity because we knew it was challenging. It wasn't paying anyone's salary; it was pure – just paying someone's bail. And the bail fund doesn't pretend it is solving any problems; it is just getting people out of jail. The fact that is it so limited makes it perfect to me. Then the press wouldn't even write about it. We told them the police shut down our party and they were like, 'Errr, OK'. But we found another location in 24 hours and moved the whole party there and 1,500 people showed up and the stuff sold out immediately.

Tell me about the *Telfar World Tour*, the exhibitions, and what they mean?

Babak: The *World Tour* idea is because we are doing a unisex line, which is totally unusual, so we thought we could do the men's sales in Milan, a women's show in New York, then back for women's shows in London with one show. We are literally going around the world with one concept, like a musician does.

Telfar: We were thinking about the schedule and cool exhibitions that could make sense, and can explain the brand.

Babak: The concert tour for us is basically an escape route out of fashion. Because we can just create something with a musician on tour and sell it in different cities and not do these cycles.

Telfar: During the first show in Milan we introduced two looks from the collection that were worn by FAKA, two performers from South Africa.[46] It was basically a performance, and we also released a new photo of me, it was the tallest – two stories tall! It was a chance for me to meet FAKA, because we were obsessed with them just from the Internet. They flew in for 12 hours, we met, they did that performance, and that was the debut of the first two looks we were doing for the show in September. And there was a book, too…

Our project at the Serpentine Gallery in London[47] will be a performance.

Telfar: It's a happening. It is not on the fashion cycle. It will have its own room to breathe and just be whatever it is. It can be perceived in any kind of way, not just as fashion. Plus, London is great.

Babak: If the show is good enough, there is no reason it can't go to six cities. And those cities don't have to have anything to do with the fashion world. We can do London, New York, Johannesburg, Chicago…

Always the same cast?

Telfar: It could be the same theme or model, or we could create a sound that could be built into anything. It could be a song that goes on for years and years and years. That's what we're going to do: go exploring and see where it goes. But right now, we just want something

'When people call our show inclusive, I'm like: inclusive of what? We are brown, it is not inclusive! It is just people who we think look good.'

'I don't need someone being like: 'Oh, because you are black, I will buy that bag.' Buy it because it is good! If you do it out of pity, pay more for it!'

cool and beautiful to happen at the Serpentine.

Are you excited?
Telfar: I'm excited, I haven't been to London since 2012. London is a rough town, rougher than Brooklyn. People eat biscuits! There are paper towels! I am super excited to go there; the best and the biggest and most important things are in London. Every time it's like that person just graduated from Central Saint Martins and it's like: give him this job! People believe in stuff. Here you have to die before you get what you deserve. It seems as though people just understand stuff there – the importance of fashion and culture and how they go together. Here they are just like: which celebrity has it?
Babak: We showed the documentary in Milan about how the party was shut down by the police, and seeing it there made me realize – wait a minute, America is just retarded. It is so backward. Everything we were going through seemed so alien; it is just so much harder here. People pretend there is just one global discourse and we are all on the same page, but it's like, no.
Telfar: Europe is definitely much more mature.

And do you have any unrealized projects and dreams?
Telfar: So many! I want to have a mobile shop that is not in one particular place, but in every place; it could be anywhere in the world. I have been working on the idea and there are just really cool places where photographically, it would just be beautiful to have a store. I want to have non-traditional retail, you know. I feel like this is the first season I have made an entire vocabulary of products. But still it feels as though they don't exist yet, so I have the job of making them exist. But first things first.
Babak: Everything is unrealized in that sense.
Telfar: When I was 17, I wanted to develop every different kind of clothing. There is still so much in the collections' vocabulary that we haven't quite got out there. This jacket is a classic, but we have to get to it before anyone else does.

What about the logo? Where and when did that come about?
Telfar: Liberian English is like broken English and old English, so I didn't really speak English when I came here. I had to take this English class at my kindergarten and my teacher used to write each student's initials like a monogram on the board. Mine was a 'T' inside a 'C' and I really liked it. I always used to sign my name like that, so basically, I've had the brand's logo since I was like five.
Babak: It is just the best logo story.

Amazing. You started shopping with your mother, right?
Telfar: She would let me try things until my dad saw it! I would also make my own clothes, and she would let me wear them on a Friday, but only on a Friday. I would wear sweatpants, but under jeans that were completely ripped all the way up to the top. I would change three times a day at school. I would turn my jeans inside out because they just looked way better. I remember when I discovered Helmut Lang and I was like: 'Oh my god, he has made the jeans that I have been doing myself. I think that was in 1997-1998. I didn't have any access to fashion, so when I actually saw people doing the thing that I was already doing with Old Navy jeans, it would actually piss me off; I used to think they were my thing. That is where a lot of things came from – wanting to do something first.

That is a great conclusion. Thank you so much.

1. House of Ninja was a collective created by dancer and choreographer William 'Willi Ninja' Leake in the 1980s. The House and Leake are widely credited with perfecting the 'vogue' style of dancing, guiding it from New York's gay nightclubs and ballrooms to global prominence.

2. Tag switching involves taking the price tag or barcode from a lower-priced item of clothing and placing it onto a higher-priced item.

3. Century 21 is a chain of department stores selling designer fashion at sale prices. The flagship store, which opened in 1961 and where Telfar shopped, is on Church and Cortlandt Streets in Lower Manhattan.

4. *Paris Is Burning* (1990), directed by Jennie Livingston, is the definitive documentary record of the New York voguing ball scene in the mid- to late 1980s. Willi Ninja features prominently in the film. The title refers to drag performer Paris Dupree (1950-2011), who organized many of the balls featured in the film.

5. Ninja founded his modelling agency EON (short for Elements of Ninja) in 2004; he died on September 2, 2006, of AIDS-related heart failure, aged 45.

6. Tokyo-born Jaiko Suzuki moved to New York in the 1990s and has since worked as a go-go dancer, , a mermaid in a 34,000-litre fish tank at the now-defunct Coral Room nightclub, an artists' model, and a drummer for the band Electroputas.

7. In mid-1970s San Diego, Gene Burkard founded a mail-order catalogue called International Male, which became known for its wide selection of smart, European-style casualwear. It also featured Undergear, an underwear section, whose photographs of stylishly comfortable undergarments modelled by beefcake models continue to make the now-defunct catalogue a Proustian *madeleine* for many American gay men.

8. The ninth Berlin Biennale – entitled *The Present in Drag* – was curated by DIS, with communications assistance from Babak Radboy; it was held from June 4-September 18, 2016. Telfar had a retrospective at the event and Clemens designed its 'guard and visitor uniforms'.

9. Spring/Summer 2014.

10. Celebrity-news magazine *Us Weekly* was founded in 1977 by the New York Times Company. *Us Weekly* is now owned by American Media, the publisher of *National Enquirer*, whose CEO David Pecker, is a long-time supporter of US president Donald Trump.

11. Ryan Trecartin is an artist best known for a series of experimental films made over the past 10 years. Since 2001, he has frequently worked with fellow artist Lizzie Fitch.

12. Kevin McGarry is a writer and journalist specializing in contemporary art.

13. Katrina, a Category-5 hurricane, hit New Orleans in late August 2005 overwhelming the city's levees and killing nearly 2,000 people.

14. Like Ryan Trecartin, Lizzie Fitch was born in 1981 and studied at the Rhode Island School of Design. Her work takes in video, performance, sculpture and installations.

15. New Galerie is at 2 Rue Borda in Paris and represents Telfar Clemens and DIS.

16. The show presented Fall/Winter 2013.

17. The herpes simplex virus has two forms: HSV-1 causes oral herpes, while HSV-2 leads to genital herpes.

18. Kelela Mizanekristos has released one album, and worked with Gorillaz, Solange and Girl Unit.

19. DIS is a New York-based self-described 'collective of cultural producers'. Its main outlet is DIS Magazine, an online platform, that deals with new ideas of art, fashion, music and culture. DIS curated the ninth Berlin Biennale in 2016.

20. Avena Gallagher is a stylist based in New York.

21. Shayne Oliver is the co-founder and designer of New York-based label Hood by Air, which is currently on hiatus.

22. Leilah Weinraub is the CEO of Hood by Air and the director of *Shakedown*, a documentary about an underground black-lesbian strip club in Los Angeles.

23. Raul Lopez is a self-taught designer and co-founder of Hood by Air, who has since founded his own label, Luar.

24. Fatima Al Qadiri is a Senegal-born, Kuwait-raised composer and conceptual artist who first worked with Telfar in 2007.

25. The original Cock bar was located on Avenue A in Manhattan from 1998 to 2005. It then moved to a location on Second Avenue, which is the location where Clemens DJed.

26. Future Brown signed to Warp Records in 2014 and released its first album in February 2015.

27. The Telfar video actually uses the instrumental version of the song.

28. Facebook news feeds stopped being chronological in mid-2013.

29. Fall/Winter 2014. New Museum is a contemporary-art centre located at 235 Bowery in Manhattan.

30. Guests were greeted in the lobby by a smiling, larger-than-life 3D-printed figure of Clemens himself.

31. Nathan Whipple is a New York-based artist and musician who plays in art-rock band Hairbone (ex-Hairbo).

32. Rudolf Gernreich, better known as Rudi, was a fashion designer, an inventive dancer, an early gay-rights activist, and a dedicated maker of soup. He began full-time fashion design in 1949 and, by June 1961, the *New York Times* was calling him 'California's most successful export since the orange'. Gernreich's final collection hit stores in 1981, after which he dedicated himself to making soup using recipes that followed unique colour concepts. Gernreich died on April 21, 1985, in Los Angeles.

33. Bruno Latour is a French anthropologist and philosopher specializing in the philosophy, history, sociology and anthropology of science. .

34. The Liberian Civil War began in late December 1989 when ex-civil servant Charles Taylor and his forces invaded the north of the country to overthrow military dictator Samuel Doe. He was executed in September 1990, which simply led to a battle for control between Taylor and two other warlords. After a ceasefire and fraudulent elections, Taylor became president in 1997 (one election slogan: 'He killed my Ma, he killed my Pa, but I will vote for him'), but a second civil war began in 1999 and Taylor was toppled in 2003. The two wars eventually left over 200,000 dead and 1 million displaced people, as well as destroying much of the country's infrastructure.

35. Spring/Summer 2019.

36. Arthur Jafa is an African-American artist, film director and cinematographer.

37. Alton Mason was discovered on Instagram and is now a regular for Gucci.

38. Created in 1921, White Castle is often considered the world's first fast-food restaurant chain. The chain's trademark offering is a small, 'steam-grilled' square hamburger, called a slider. White Castle calls its customers 'cravers', a notion most completely illustrated by 'stoner' classic *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004).

39. Clemens' childhood White Castle is 89-03 57th Avenue, Queens.

40. Jamie Richardson, vice president of government and shareholder relations at White Castle.

41. American Eagle Outfitters has two brands, American Eagle and Aerie. In 1999, it became the official outfitter of hit US TV drama *Dawson's Creek*.

42. The charity Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights runs a programme to pay the bail of poor inmates held in New York's Rikers Island prison.

43. The Telfar x White Castle LeFrak capsule collection was released in November 2017.

44. LeFrak City is a large housing project in Queens, New York. It was built between 1962 and 1971, when its 20 17-storey towers made it the largest privately financed residential development in the United States.

45. The New York Police Department is said to have set up its Rap Intelligence Unit in 1999 following the murders of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls as a way to track the hip-hop community. The unit's existence was never officially confirmed.

46. According to its website, FAKA is 'a cultural movement established by Fela Gucci and Desire Marea', which expresses 'their ideas about themes central to their experience as black queer bodies navigating the cis-hetero-topia of post-colonial Africa.'

47. *Telfar, For You, Not For Everyone*, featuring the Telfar Spring/Summer 2019 collection and performances by FAKA and a choir, was part of the *Serpentine Park Nights 2018* programme. It took place in the Serpentine Pavilion 2018, designed by Frida Escobedo, in Hyde Park, London, on August 10, 2018.

‘Here’s your new body – get in’

Telfar Spring/Summer 2019

Starring: Aaliyah Hydes at Muse, Johan, Sean, Mahi, Milo, Michael, LZ, Awar at Midland, Mohamed at St. Claire, Oyinda, Butch Dawson, Selah Marley, Smooky MarGielaa, Buffu7o, SahBabii, Jakuzzi, Steve Lacy, Imani, Hamza. Production: HARBINGER. Executive producer: Spencer Morgan Taylor. Casting: Midland Agency. Hair stylist: Kabuto Okuzawa. Makeup artist: Susie Sobol. Lighting designer: David Diesing. Artist bookings: Nick Hadad. Producer: Serie Yoon. Photographer’s assistant: Will Englehardt. Stylist’s assistant: Greg Miller. Styling interns: Samuel Gamberg, Marcus Haarms, Jamont Hanshaw, Nancy Xu. Talent: Jeff at Akrav Agency. Makeup assistant: Ayaka Nihei, Miki Ishikura. Hair assistant: Risako Itamochi, Kazuhide Katahira. Prop stylist: Andy Harman. Prop assistants: Sierra Villarreal, Jan Frallicciardi. Coordinator: Zach Wolff. Production assistant: Benjamin Gutierrez, Smij Williams. Digital technician: Jonathan Nesteruk. Retouching: Two Three Two. Special thanks: Mark Holgate, Vibes Studios, Skyway Golf Course, Shearwater, Atlantic Aviation, Shingo Shibata.

REFUGEE
KING OF BEE

N13UA

SHEARWATER

EZGO

WASTE BY WEIGHT THAN A COMPARABLE FOAM CUP

N13UA

NGER
ROTOR
REA

SHEA

‘It’s just about the clothes and nothing else.’

With A_PLAN_APPLICATION, sculptor and designer Anna Blessmann creates ‘clothes as clothes, not as entertainment’. Over the following pages, she discusses the new label, and models and photographs her debut collection of conceptless conceptualism.

Photography by Anna Blessmann, in collaboration with Jared Beck

'A_PLAN_APPLICATION is just about the clothes and nothing else. I also have my art, so when I'm designing clothes, I don't feel like I have to fill them with *meaning*. I want wearable clothing that fulfils its function as clothing, so it can be a part of your daily life. It should be more than decoration. I'm not interested in what you might call 'costume'. I mean, those kind of 'fashion' clothes are compelling as experiments, but going about my daily life, I have other requirements.

I've always felt this way about clothes. As a teenager in Berlin, I often made my own as I didn't really have the money. Back then, many people were, or they were buying their clothes at army-surplus stores or at kilo sales. That was also a political statement: you wouldn't buy Gap or H&M because you didn't want to be seen supporting massive corporations. Later, when I was modelling, the clothes I had to wear were often more like costumes; they weren't *me*. Which is fundamental because not only can clothes define your sense of self, they can also make you more you. As an artist, you are always creating your own world and I don't think it's an accident that various women artists, including Georgia O'Keeffe, made their own clothes. Artists are hyper-aware of visual codes, language, shape, and movement and art for me *is* that awareness.

I brought this sense of seeing, thinking and feeling to A_PLAN_APPLICATION. The label started after a conversation with Virgil [Abloh] and Peter [Saville, designer and Blessmann's partner] about how fashion seemed to be either disposable or marketing-led. I decided I wanted to make clothes that concentrated on the essentials – silhouette, cut, colour, touch, texture, shape and movement – so I began by thinking about my own experience. Which piece do I always go back to? Which ones did I think I wanted but then never wore? Designing the collection has still been a big learning curve for me, though.

With a piece of art, you only need one person to like and buy it. But with a fashion label, you need to convince a bigger audience of retailers and then customers willing to buy into the vision it represents. Another challenge is the speed at which everything happens in fashion; it's so much faster than art – even when you don't want to take part in the race, which I don't. I always say that A_PLAN_APPLICATION is for people with longer attention spans.

Now that the collection is out in the world, I'm just really curious to watch the clothes become part of people's lives and see them actually worn. I'm fascinated by the idea of what they might mean to other people. How these complete strangers are going to make them their own and associate them to specific events in their lives. We all do it – that night you danced in a particular pair of shoes, the place you went wearing those trousers, or the coat you used as a cover when you slept in the back of the car. What I want more than anything is for these clothes to become an integral part of people's lives.'

As told to Jorinde Croese

All clothing A_Plan_Application Autumn/Winter 2018-2019.

Photographer's assistant: Alex Tracey. Hair stylist: Peter Smith. Makeup artist: Camila Fernandez using MAC Cosmetics. Stylist's assistant: Eloise Chong-Gargette. Digital tech: Bruno Conrad.

‘Italian fashion is torn between nostalgia and progress.’

Angelo Flaccavento, Italy’s most authoritative (and opinionated) voice in fashion journalism, gets vocal.

By Jonathan Wingfield
Photographs by Johnny Dufort
Styling by Lotta Volkova

'*Paris Fashion Week which closed yesterday lasted for too long and provided little pleasure.*'
(The Business of Fashion, October 3, 2018)

Angelo Flaccavento tells it like it is. The Sicilian journalist has been writing about fashion for almost 20 years, and if you've never come across his show reviews and industry reporting – principally for Italian daily business newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore* and digital platform the Business of Fashion – then you're missing a treat. Or escaping torture, depending on whether you find yourself on the receiving end of his no-nonsense, hit-'em-where-it-hurts prose. Because in today's era of native content, puff-pieces and general editorial fluffiness, Flaccavento serves up eye-watering missives that are as startlingly honest and unvarnished as they are likely to reveal fashion's inconvenient truths.

Not that Flaccavento relies on bitchiness to gain attention. The erudite authority and knowingness that his writing exudes is light years away from the social-media vitriol driving much of today's op-ed commentary. And while throwing industrial, political or societal context into a critique about a hemline or silhouette might on paper (or screen) sound like a recipe for pompous disaster, Flaccavento possesses a self-awareness and sense of pragmatism that reads more like an impassioned 'Can't we all do better than this?', rather than one-upmanship delivered from fashion's ivory tower.

In particular, it's Flaccavento's evaluation of Italian fashion – past, present and future – that distinguishes him as a vital resource for the industry. Fashion in Italy is unquestionably at a crossroads right now. Gucci continues its prolific turnaround growth, based largely on a marketing-heavy shift towards product diversity and behavioural inclusivity. Prada, meanwhile, preserves its inherent stylistic and intellectual elitism (for an industry that rightfully adores the house), all while navigating the scale and democratisation of the digital age (for an emerging consumer that's yet to make up its mind). If Italian fashion remains synonymous with empires and dynasties, then right now it feels like a particularly exciting episode in a long-running *sceneggiati* (soap opera): Valentino's succession plan is a shining light of grace and intelligence; Fendi selling itself to French conglomerate LVMH has certainly paid off; while the fortunes of Versace, Armani, Missoni, et al., remain very much unresolved. Even Italy's proud history of craftsmanship and formal tailoring, exemplified by the 'Made in Italy' seal of approval, all seem desperately at odds with the global rise of streetwear and sneakers.

With all this swimming through our minds, *System* has spent the past couple of seasons in the company of Angelo Flaccavento. We sat down to record conversations with the Sicilian that bookend a six-month period: firstly, on the eve of Autumn/Winter 2018 Milan Fashion Week back in February, and more recently the morning after Gucci's Spring/Summer 2019 show (the one which closed the Milan season, yet bafflingly took place in Paris) in September. What follows is Flaccavento off-duty: historically on point, naturally curious, dry, always opinionated, and good company. Meanwhile, stylist Lotta Volkova and photographer Johnny Dufort took to the streets of Milan to shoot a photographic survey of Italian fashion from A(rmani) to Z(anotti).

Part I
Milan
February 20, 2018

A beginner's question to start with. Why and how did Milan emerge as Italy's fashion capital?
Italian fashion as we know it was born in 1951. Marquis Giovanni Battista Giorgini[1] invited American buyers who were visiting Paris over to his home in Florence to purchase Italian-made garments. Fast-forward to the early 1970s and there was a move from Florence – where Pitti[2] had become the focal point of Italian fashion – to Milan, where the foundations were established for what would become the prêt-à-porter shows. These shows really started to flourish in around 1976, 1978, but the likes of Missoni, Krizia and Walter Albini had been showing in Milan since 1971.

Tell me more about Walter Albini. He was a pivotal figure at the time, but never really became a household name.
Although he died very young, Albini is considered the grandfather of Italian fashion.[3] He initiated what we now recognize as Milan's prêt-à-porter shows, but was literally too ahead of the times to reap the benefits. He was a freelance designer who'd worked in different capacities for different brands: designing raincoats for one brand that was working with one particular manufacturer; knitwear for another brand with another manufacturer; skirts for another. In 1971, he assembled all these different pieces as a collection and presented it under his own name in Milan at the Circolo del Giardino,[4] rather than going to Pitti in Florence.

Designing for multiple brands was quite common at the time though, right? Giorgio Armani was doing that before starting his own label.
Yes, but Albini was the first one to bring these things together under his own name. He projected himself as the *auteur* of the collection, while the manufacturers became the producers. So, for the first time, it was more about the Italian designer presenting his vision for the forthcoming season.

What kind of image was he projecting through his brand?
Albini was incredibly vain, but in a charming way. His aesthetic was very 1920s, very *Great Gatsby*, very languid and nostalgic. He also did beautiful drawings. He famously staged a show at the Caffè Florian in Venice,[5] and had a beautiful showroom space that he created here in Milan, in the Art Deco district right behind the Parco Montanelli.[6] It was completely covered with mirrored tiles and quite exquisite. He was constantly changing his aesthetic: at one point, one of his houses had raw concrete on the floor and rubber curtains. He once did a men's collection without actually designing any clothes; he just borrowed stuff from his friends and created looks. That was typical of the late 1970s.

A radical time.
Designers were expected to be radical, because customers at the time were daring enough to buy those strong statement pieces. In fashion today, the show is often just showmanship. That's why I respect designers like Rick Owens or Rei Kawakubo: crazy stuff on the catwalk, crazy stuff in the shop – and it sells. But then there are all those designers doing crazy shows, but whose shops are full of navy-blue jackets. It makes no sense.

Let's go back to the emergence of Milan as Italy's fashion capital.
What's key to understand is that the industrial manufacturers have been mostly situated around here, in the north. Italy is a land of *comuni* [districts], and historically there have been districts specialized in a particular sector of production. The area around Carpi is known for knitwear; shoes in Italy are made either in the Brenta, which is towards Venice, so not far from Milan; fabric industries are around Milan and Como with the silk and the printers, and the wool mills in Piedmont. So it is basically throughout this region, with Milan as the central city.

So the marriage of industry and design brought fashion to Milan?
Milan has always been a city of design; it's a symbol of progress. If you divide Italy into just two cities, you have Milan in the north and Rome as the entry towards the south. Rome represents the past – it's always been there, but has no sense of momentum – whereas Milan is about modernity and speed and industry. Being Italy's northern city, it is also closest to the rest of Europe. Milan is a mindset; everything happens very fast here, and that is how fashion first flourished here, in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Was Italian industry as a whole booming at the time?
Like in Great Britain, the 1970s were a very difficult time in Italy, defined by political uproar and deep recession. Milan itself could be very dangerous because, like most big cities in Italy, there were frequent terrorist attacks. But as the country emerged from that period, in the early 1980s, there was a lot of money around and, all of a sudden, fashion in Italy became synonymous with the status of success. People were keen to show what they were earning, which meant the car you drove, the house you lived in, and, crucially, what you wore. Fashion became such a huge phenomenon because it filtered all the way from the top of society down to the common man and woman. *Everybody* was in tune with what was happening in fashion, in ways that no longer exist today.

How did this affect your own family?
I grew up in Ragusa, a small town in the south-east of Sicily. I got interested in fashion very quickly because my relatives – the sister and the brother of my father – owned high-end boutiques,

'Fashion became such a huge phenomenon in 1980s Italy, because it filtered all the way from the top of society down to the common man and woman.'

'Walter Albini once did a men's collection without actually designing any clothes; he just borrowed stuff from his friends and created looks.'

Opening page:
Archive dress and skirt by Gianfranco Ferre from Cavalli e Nastri.
Shoes by Giuseppe Zanotti, Autumn/Winter 2018.

This page:
Cape, jumpsuit, hat and shoes by Valentino,
Autumn/Winter 2018.
Necklace with pearls by Valentino Garavani
from Cavalli e Nastri.

Jumpsuit by Emilio Pucci, Resort 2019.
Shoes by Erika Cavallini, Resort 2019.

Archive dress, scarf and bracelets by Walter Albini.
Boots by Fabrizio Viti, Resort 2019.

Archive jacket and jumpsuit by Krizia from Madame Pauline.
Shoes vintage Salvatore Ferragamo from The Way We Wore.

Versace, Resort 2019.

catering to the affluent local clientele. These small towns in Sicily and elsewhere in Italy were where Italian designers made their money in the 1980s because people were so eager to spend incredible amounts on the latest fashions. I remember my uncle and my aunt themselves spending tons on clothing.

What were they buying?
Versace, Missoni, Valentino, all the glitzy stuff. We are Italians and we like to show off!

How were the designers regarded in Italian society, and in the media?
They were constantly on television and in the newspapers, giving their opinion on *everything* – politics, society, not just style and clothing. But that also helped to create a sense of mythology around them that today's designers no longer have, probably because the way we communicate now is so different. These days anyone can send Alessandro Michele a direct message on Instagram; back then, the designers were strictly off limits, protected by a shield of muses and publicists. They really were the new emperors, and behaved accordingly. I mean, think of Gianni Versace, whose persona was almost like a Roman emperor. Or Valentino in Rome.

Yes, let's talk about Rome. I'm particularly interested in the relationship between Rome and America, and how that laid the foundation for Italy's reputation as being stylish and producing stylish clothes. There's this clichéd perception that Hollywood movie stars would come to Rome in the 1950s and 1960s to shoot at Cinecittà, go shopping at Gucci on their days off, and end up promoting Italian style to the whole of America.
Well, that's about right. Rome was two things: haute couture and cinema. Cinecittà was such an active studio,[7] they were filming big American productions like *Cleopatra* there. I think that Italian fashion has always needed to be channelled through something inaccessible or dreamlike in order for it to really capture people's imaginations. These days, of course, that means influencers, who are the most democratic manifestation of that, but back then, it was untouchable movie stars. I remember my mother telling me that you'd see a look in a movie, then go to a local seamstress or tailor and get them to replicate it for you.

Would you say that link between Italian fashion and American stardom has endured?
We've always used American inventions like cinema and advertising to project an idea of Italian fashion. Certainly, if you think about what *American Gigolo* did for Armani.[8] That was 1980, and the film's American director Paul Schrader chose to dress this new male archetype in a way that was kind of formal but informal. Richard Gere's character was a man who studiously took care of both his appearance and his body. Schrader dressed him in Armani because it exemplified a sense of modernity: soft tailoring, and having everything from his neck tie to his blazer in the same shades.

What about womenswear?
In the movie *Working Girl*,[9] when Melanie Griffith transforms from a Staten Island girl into a career woman, she comes out dressed in Armani, too. She starts that film looking very American with big hair and big shoulders and then when she becomes refined, she is dressed in a grey Armani suit and looking very understated.

Let's talk about advertising. In the 1980s here in Italy, fashion advertising exploded; it felt like all the Italian brands were hiring top American photographers and adopting big American marketing schemes to show the world what they could do. It was ostentatious, and it worked.
At the time, Italian fashion was all about the union of the designers, the textile mills and the manufacturers, so you'd have six different factories each paying a chunk of the advertising for a brand. Everyone understood the power of advertising, because it was another example of American culture being good for business. I mean, if you look at those Versace images by Avedon, they remain so powerful today.[10]

Armani's original advertising too remains very potent, very heroic.
That Armani advertising was done on a shoe-string budget, but with the aim of creating these timeless black-and-white movie stills. The clothing was modern, but the imagery was almost nostalgic, and it was a highly successful mix. If you consider all the stylists and image-makers and art directors operating today, it's hard to think of any advertising in recent years that's reached that level of sophistication and quality…

'In *Working Girl*, Melanie Griffith starts with big American hair and big shoulders and then when she becomes refined, is dressed in a grey Armani suit.'

…and success.
I think that Italians are very good at selling in that sense. It goes back to Albini and his vision for a lifestyle. Italians had the intuition that if you wanted to successfully express the fashion dream, then you had to create imagery. Being featured in a fashion magazine's editorial shoot wasn't enough – you had to create your own imagery, your own advertising.

You mentioned before that Armani was considered by Americans as 'understated' and it does seem at odds with the Italian culture of peacocking.
I think Italians are born peacocks. It's deeply rooted in our culture, probably from the Catholic culture of Sunday best. Mass on Sundays is a moment of community that's extremely hierarchical, and hierarchy is expressed through the way you present yourself.

Do you think there is an inherent conservatism to Italian society and how it presents itself?
Absolutely, we are quite conservative because we have a fear of what challenges perception. Being Catholic makes us very conformist and so you maybe have your wild moments when nobody's looking, but publicly, you comply to the code. Unlike Great Britain, Italy is not a place of subcultures. For us, it is more about showing off than belonging to a movement and creating an opposition through what we wear.

Have there ever been subcultures in Italian society?
The only one specifically tied to clothes was the Paninari[11] in the 1980s which, unsurprisingly, was all about showing off. These days, it has been mythologized and looks 'nice' and not at all subversive. But do we have subcultures in the British sense? No. I guess you can occasionally spot people's political preferences by the way they dress, but it is rare.

When you consider what many of the Italian fashion houses are now proposing stylistically, it feels like the Italianness of Italian fashion has been sidelined.
Absolutely. I can barely see anything Italian in Italian fashion right now. I sometimes think we are somehow desperately trying to regain a national identity, as if that is what's needed to boost the industry.

That sounds like Brexit fashion.
Well, it brings up an interesting question: Is it still relevant to talk about national characteristics in fashion? I mean, what is French fashion today? It doesn't exist anymore. Paris perpetuates its reputation for being an international fashion hub, with Japanese, Belgian, British and Italian designers all mixed together, delivering diverse expressions of avant-garde and radical thinking. But its cosmopolitan-ness has eclipsed any French-ness. Compared to Paris, Italian fashion is far more insular. Historically, it is quite rare that we have foreign designers coming to show in Milan. Issey Miyake showed his menswear here for a while, but if you think about what Paris has represented for Yohji and Comme over almost 40 years, it's not comparable.

What about foreign designers working for Italian houses? At one point recently, there was talk of a foreign designer coming to work for Versace.
For me, it is difficult to imagine a foreign designer ever doing Versace. If you're talking about Italian identity – which certainly plays a part in the Versace brand – then you have to know that Italy is a place of contrast. Crudely put, there is Armani for the fashionable woman who doesn't want to scream fashion as she walks down the street, and then there's Versace for the sensual woman who wants to scream her sensuality and her being fashionable while she walks. They are both Italian, but I cannot imagine a British or an American designer understanding the many subtle nuances that exist within Italian style, society and fashion.

So maybe Donatella Versace already has her successor tucked away in her design studio, and just doesn't know it yet.
Well, the Gucci case was proof that maybe the next one is not a known name, because when Alessandro Michele took over everyone was like, 'Who on earth is this guy with the Jesus Christ look?'

Did you know much about him?
He was part of the team, like the right-hand man to Frida Giannini.[12] But what's happened there is great – whether you like what Gucci is currently doing or not in aesthetic terms, it is a genuine reflection of Alessandro Michele's taste. You can see that it is not made up. He just lives that kind of look. I think it was visionary on the part of the CEO[13]

'Italians are born peacocks. It's deeply rooted in our culture, probably from the hierarchical Catholic culture of Sunday best.'

Bra and skirts by Fendi, Spring/Summer 2019.
Shoes from stylist's archive.
Bracelet and earrings from David Roy.

Archive dress and shoes by Alberta Ferretti.

Jacket and trousers by Moschino, Spring/Summer 2019.
Boots by Fabrizio Vitti, Resort 2019.

MSGM, Resort 2019.

Krizia. Autumn/Winter 2018.

Archive coat, leggings, top and hat by Romeo Gigli.
Archive shoes by Romeo Gigli from Passage Archives.

to give him that opportunity, and not go with a more obvious 'star' designer. Those 'star' names that circulate are always the same few.

I suppose the all-important message is slightly underwhelming when you have to ask 'who?', as opposed to saying 'Ahhh!'
Yes. I think as Italians we also have to rid ourselves of this inferiority complex that we have to other countries, Britain in particular. If you are a stylist with a British name here then you work a lot; if you are a good stylist here but with an Italian name, then you won't work. It is very strange. We like what comes from abroad, it looks cooler, even if it is the same as what's here. It comes back to the idea of wanting a projection of Italy through an American lens.

And yet conversely the idea of 'Made in Italy' remains universally appealing.
And it is written in English because the power of 'Made is Italy' is better perceived abroad.

When did people start sewing 'Made in Italy' labels into Italian clothes?
I think that as a marketing device, it emerged in the 1970s thanks to Giovanni Giorgini, the guy who sought to promote Italian fashion. The reality goes back further of course, because Italy has historically always had very high-quality artisanal craftsmanship. But between the 1950s and the 1970s, we were able to transform artisanal into industrial. Italy is one of the only countries where this happened.

Italian textile factories seem to have a near-mythical status.
I love visiting them to see first-hand the Italian flare for creating things. I visited the Kiton factory in Naples[14] and they stressed that everything is made by hand. Their suits cost thousands, so people maybe think, 'OK, it's all part of some marketing strategy to have a very high mark-up'; then you go to the factory and you see they have 100 or 200 tailors working. The Italians are very inventive, so the industries found a way to turn industry into something manual. My mother is from central Italy, a region well known for knitwear, and she was telling me that the industrial manufacturers lend their knitwear machinery to local women who work from home. The manufacturer then collects everything from the locals and put the labels in; it's like 'extreme artisanal'.

Would you say the 'Made in Italy' stamp has as much gravitas as it did, say, 20 years ago?
For a certain customer, yes, because it is a guarantee of quality. But for younger customers, far less so. I mean, fast fashion changed everything; it changed the mentality of people who buy designer fashion, because high fashion has adopted the modality of fast fashion – the need for constant drops.

Fashion's never felt so ephemeral.
I remember in my aunt's shop in Sicily, there were only two or three 'drops' a year – not that she called them that. She already had everything in stock; she just decided what to put out in the shop from the backroom. These days, your coat is only as good as the week it stays in the shop, then it is gone and so has its value.

But for me, selling clothes and selling fashion are two quite distinct things. Fashion is something higher for me, because buying a fashion item is creating a discourse about yourself and projecting it onto others.

Do you think it would be good for business for Italian brands to push their Italian-ness again?
I don't know. Having a unified identity for Italian fashion today is anachronistic because we live in an age of fragmentation. Being Italian might be perceived as being monolithic and old, but we should also be more self-conscious, and stop trying to mimic other fashion weeks. These days, we are no longer avant-garde, but that is perfectly fine. You should just take the situation into your own hands and if you are worth something, I think that something positive will happen.

Ultimately, fashion, like everything else today is becoming increasingly homogenized.
Yes, and so you ask yourself the question, 'Should Italy push Italian identity right now, or should we accept that being globally successful means making globally homogenized fashion?' I mean, Americans express American identity, but unfortunately American identity is, for the most part, just about selling clothes. In design terms – apart from the odd outcast designer – it's bland because they always just seem to be derivatives of something else.

Where does Italian fashion sit within this?

'When Alessandro Michele took over at Gucci, everyone was like, 'Who on earth is this guy with the Jesus Christ look?''

It sits halfway between Paris and America. We know how to make nice clothes that sell, and we're pretty good at marketing them, but we can also be inventors. That for me is why the 1980s remains such a mythological era for Italian fashion. It found that perfect balance between invention, product and a way of communicating a strong identity to the public. It is very telling for me that Moncler has chosen to name its current project Moncler Genius; I'd say that's a nod to the Genius Group of Adriano Goldschmied,[15] who was one of the inventors of Italian streetwear. Adriano Goldschmied was basically acting as an umbrella for different stylistic entities, and it was very interesting at the time.

Tell me about the new wave of Italian designers. Could you ever envisage a new set of fashion empires emerging?
I think that at some point today's empires will start to crumble. But for the time being I don't see new designers building new empires. I think most of them are happy to cultivate their own little space, which I think is a good way to express their vision. I mean, if you want to compete with the very big houses you need so much money, and to find that financing will just kill the creativity. A designer I really respect is Marco de Vincenzo.[16] He is partly financed by LVMH because he is still the bag designer at Fendi, but I like that he is creating an identity and carving a niche at his own level, while also working for the mainstream. Lucio Vanotti,[17] with his playful minimalism, is another one; I've asked him about the scale of company he wants to become many times, but he doesn't want to get huge. He is happy with the clients that he has, and is happy to grow little by little each season.

Is there much support for Italian fashion on a state level? It has to be one of Italy's largest exports.
It's been a long story and not particularly linear one.

Why?
Italian institutions have sometimes promoted fashion in this big paternalistic way; promoting young talent, which is great, but paternalism means they don't always choose the right talent. They'll do quick-fire research and just pull out some people. The new generation of Italian designers needs to stop thinking that they're victims of the older generation not giving them credit, and just own their own space, like what happens in London and Paris. Right now, there's not much 'I am here – look at me!' I think there needs to be.

You mean, there's not much arrogance of youth in Italian fashion.
I think that my generation or younger, we have a problem with growing up. In Italy, there is an inherent sense of respect for our elders; we prefer to still be the son or the daughter of someone. I think the big designers still see these emerging designers as really small and insignificant people. They are not little; their aspirations are just measured by what they think they can achieve. And I think it's sad that none of them are saying: 'Listen, I am here, I am young, and I have something more interesting to say than the older generation.'

They'd probably have to leave Italy.
Yes, I think it is deeply embedded in Italian culture, in all environments, even the academic environment. It is a circle that never ends: it takes such a long time for young people to become established that by the time they do, they are old enough to have seen a younger generation emerge beneath them, and to consider them as a threat. So it goes on and on. It is very difficult for Italian people to take responsibility and act independently. That is why in Paris and London I get surprised by these designers who literally pop up from nowhere.

I think in London there is such a promotion of new talent that sometimes the promotion is more successful than the reality.
But with Italian fashion we need to learn how to do that. Tomorrow is the beginning of fashion week and three of the best new names are placed on the schedule between 9.30 and 11am. Albino Teodoro, Arthur Arbesser,[18] who is Austrian but works in Milan, and Lucio Vanotti, who I just mentioned. But the Gucci [Autumn/Winter 2018] show is in the afternoon – it basically represents the start of the week – so only a few people will get to see these new designers. It's a wasted opportunity…

…for the whole industry here.
We are not very strategic. Look at how in general, France promotes its cultural heritage and its monuments, and it

'If you're a stylist with a British-sounding name then you work a lot here; if you're a good stylist here but with an Italian name, you won't work.'

Archive dress by Romeo Gigli from Resurrection Vintage.
Archive top by Romeo Gigli from Passage Archives.

Coat, dress and shoes by Bottega Veneta, Autumn/Winter 2018.
Tights from stylist's archive.

Coat, top, skirt, bag, socks and shoes by Prada, Resort 2019.
Underwear and ring model's own.

Top, skirt, shoes, belts and earrings by Marni, Spring/Summer 2019.
Rings and bracelets by Repossi.
Cone ring by Joanne Burke.

really has a fraction compared to Italy. Italy is the only country where Italians themselves scribble graffiti over our old statues. We are so used to being surrounded by these things that we don't care about them, and we don't know how to promote them. Other places in the world have a single old column and have made a whole tourist industry around it!

Is there a sense of community in Italian fashion? Or is it very fractured, with empire after empire after empire?
It is fractured. I was not around to witness it first-hand but it looked more like a community in the late 1970s, early 1980s. There is one famous picture[19] from 1985 in which all the Italian designers are stood together – arms around each other, all smiling – in front of the cathedral. It says a lot, you'd never see that today. Everything has become very insular and fragmented.

Yet despite the economically unstable times, the Italian fashion market continues to grow.
Absolutely. Fashion is still one of Italy's principal industries, yet it has always been considered a little frivolous.[20] I mean, the prime minister has only been attending fashion week in the recent years; it's taken ages for that to happen. And in the media, if you look at newspapers' advertising pages, they're almost all fashion and beauty brands, yet journalists have to fight every fashion week to have any space in those same newspapers to print articles.

You mentioned Krizia earlier on. It's interesting as it was a significant and influential house at the time, yet barely exists in people's minds now. What led some Italian houses to become global businesses, while others faded?
There were so many houses that were big and have fallen. Look at the way Gianfranco Ferre completely and criminally folded. I think the deciding factor behind any Italian fashion brand's success or failure is that as Italians we remain attached to the idea of the family business. So the family business is all about the patron, the boss. And I think that no matter how hard you try, you are only truly modern just once in your life. It seems impossible to sustain or, worse still, replicate that particular moment.

Dare I ask you to give me an example?
I respect Miuccia Prada immensely, but I do not consider her so modern any longer. Of course, she's had a huge impact on fashion, but the more success you get the more you get pushed into the ivory tower, and the less you see out onto the real world. I think designers often observe the world through the lens of the people close to them who report back to them. So they lose touch in a way. Designers give their best when they are poorer: think about what Nicolas Ghesquière was doing at Balenciaga when there was such limited budget.

Your point about only being modern once brings us to the current idea of fashion nostalgia, none more so than Versace's big Gianni Versace homage last year.
I think I was one of the only few who didn't particularly like that tribute collection. It was very smart business-wise and it *was* very emotional, but the true emotion that hit me was one of melancholy. And so I wrote that very clearly in my review. I had a meeting with Versace about the review because they thought that I'd had a preformed opinion about Donatella going into that show, which is absolutely not true. I respect her immensely as a designer and as a human being, and I think she has done a terrific job in the past. Of course, I am not in her shoes, and having a figure such as Gianni Versace in the background must be very hard to cope with emotionally and professionally. But for me, doing this tribute collection was like admitting: 'OK, I will always be a little smaller, a little less of a genius.' Moving things forward by reconsidering the past is nothing new, but replicating the past, 20 years on, is dangerous because nothing's ever the same: bodies are different, models are different, everything's moved on.

What about Dolce & Gabbana, which seemed to emerge so quickly in the early 1990s?
They emerged with a vision of masculinity and femininity that was grounded in their Sicilian origins, but made modern. When they first started menswear, it looked quite mafia but done in a very interesting way. It was metropolitan and looked very appealing, so all of a sudden dressing like a shepherd from Palermo looked cool; you'd see people in New York dressed like that. They are still doing this Sicilian thing today, but I personally feel that it has become too kitsch. It is all about the decoration and the correct earrings and that kind of stuff. They were really an expression of Italian sensuality – very proud, but not too brash or vulgar – and they didn't need to decorate, because it was all about the black dresses and black suits and white shirts, and it was always very powerful. But of course, if you choose a niche, like being inspired by Sicily, you cannot go on forever, and at some point you have to get out of that. Ultimately, I think that when designers feel they are losing relevance they cling to things and can't deal with the changing times.

Will that dynamic will define the immediate future of Italian fashion?
Italian fashion is always torn between nostalgia and progress. It's about navigating memories of big success, the desire to replicate that moment, and the difficulty of acknowledging that the moment has passed and times have changed – that is one of the diseases of Italian culture in every field.

What about succession in family businesses?
If the family business is properly managed, it means that the father or the mother will hand the reins over to the next generation. But when they do so they need to step back, not hand over the power but then stick around and continue directing.

What will happen to houses like Prada or Armani that have been so successfully steered by the mind of the boss?
That could become a big problem, because you strongly identify those houses with the identity of the founder. Even if these people are not really designing anymore, they are like a deity. Honestly, I don't know what will happen.

We haven't talked about Valentino at all, which feels like a good example of Italian fashion successfully evolving.
Absolutely. I think it has been done with brains and heart. What Pierpaolo [Piccioli] is doing now – both in prêt-à-porter and couture – is completely relevant. He has been there long enough to understand the core values of the house, but he is also an individual so he knows how to push his own buttons inside the house and contextualize them within the present. Pierpaolo did a number of very smart things. Firstly, he brought Valentino out of the colour red; red was always the house colour, but now you identify Valentino with a broader palette. Secondly, when you now see a dress that is very flowy but not super big – a kind of spiritualized silhouette without looking like a nun – you think of Valentino. Whereas in the past when you thought of Valentino, you only really thought of big bows and big skirts. And thirdly, the Valentino clientele was historically all about Latin American socialites, but Pierpaolo is now catering to another audience. And he's made these changes in light and poetic ways. It's a real achievement.

Tellingly, it's the Italian houses that relinquished family control and were acquired by French conglomerates – namely Kering with Gucci and LVMH with Fendi – that are faring best today.
Yes, there has been a huge shift. What those conglomerates have created reflects what is happening in broader society. Wealth and power have become concentrated into very few hands, and so the likes of Fendi and Gucci have become so big that they can literally do anything. That has made the small houses even smaller, with smaller means and smaller amounts of power with which to communicate their image and their products. Even Armani, a house that continues to exude a certain power, feels relatively small compared to LVMH or Kering. The creation of these conglomerates has somehow polluted the system in Italy, and probably everywhere else. It's created a culture of flexing muscles and showing off power.

And it isn't always a win-win for brands operating within those groups.
It has certainly put an emphasis on having to perform very well. Other brands flourished in their heyday in a more natural way, whereas today it is all about marketing. But of course, the capitalist trajectory is very straightforward – you can only grow or collapse, there is no third option. So, when you grow, you have to make your decisions. At Krizia, for example, Mariuccia Mandelli refused that kind of trajectory.

Do you think that the success of Gucci can be sustained?
I have no crystal ball. I think the Gucci success will last a bit longer, but all of a sudden it will stop, as things always do in fashion. This is even more likely to happen because Gucci's current style is based on repeating the same stylistic tropes, season after season. So at some

'As a designer, no matter how hard you try, you're only truly modern once in your life. It's impossible to sustain or replicate that particular moment.'

'Even Armani, a house that's always felt powerful, and continues to exude a certain power, feels small compared to the likes of LVMH or Kering.'

Jacket, shorts and earrings by Dolce & Gabbana, Autumn/Winter 2018.
Shoes by Giuseppe Zanotti, Resort 2019.
Tights by Calzedonia.
Bow with hairnet from stylist's archive.

Cardigan, jumper, trousers and shoes by Missoni, Spring/Summer 2019.
Earring (right) and ring by Delfina Delettrez.
Bracelet from David Roy.

Archive jacket, dress and skirt by Moschino.
Tights by Gallo.
Boots by Fabrizio Viti, Resort 2019.

Top, trousers and boots by Salvatore Ferragamo, Spring/Summer 2019.
Rings by Repossi.

Jacket and earrings by Dolce & Gabbana, Autumn/Winter 2018.
Bow with hairnet from stylist's archive.

Waistcoat, shorts and necklace by Roberto Cavalli, Spring/Summer 2019.
Shoes from stylist's archive.
Earrings by Buccellati.
Tights by Calzedonia.

point, the public will inevitably get fed up, and will be like, *basta*.

That idea of successfully repeating one's stylistic tropes feels particularly true of some Italian brands like Armani and Dolce & Gabbana. Whereas Prada…

…created the era of sudden change every six months. But to be honest, Miuccia Prada has always been very smart because that is what is perceived on top – it's the foam on the cappuccino. The core of Prada for me is going to the shop and looking how the clerks are dressed – *that* is Prada. They look like teachers, you know: pleated skirts, turtleneck or cardigan, and men in suits. The basis is always very bourgeois, a very Swiss college aesthetic, but of course, what we love Miuccia for is the crazy fashion statements. And she can do the crazy stuff because of the bourgeois stuff, and the luggage being very consistent and reassuring and solid.

That seems to neatly symbolize Miuccia Prada's relationship with her own family business.

Absolutely. She can go bonkers sometimes, but the luggage and the pleated skirts and the fine cashmere will always be there.

What would you say was an example of a well-maintained Italian family fashion business?

A brand I respect is Missoni. They've sustained the sense of that family business. Of course, there have been multiple rumours about them selling a stake of the business, and I think that might happen soon,[21] but I have been to the factory and it is amazing because they have kept things afloat as they were for a long time. I mean, the brand is more than 50 years old, but they still do everything there – the factory and Rosita's house in the same park.[22] But as I said, at one point if you want to become a real player in the global market you have to take that position, or you stay small and super niche, which I personally think is the right way forward for some brands. You keep afloat, but you're not making billions.

But it feels like in fashion today, you're not a true player until you're a billion-dollar business.

But what can you do with all those billions? A lifetime can now last 85, 90 years. Of course, you can become part of that whole machine, but that machine kills everything because it is not about French fashion or Italian fashion any more – it is just about selling clothing. And while Gucci is the main trendsetter and powerhouse right now, the real power in Italian fashion remains the fact that we are hands down the best manufacturers in the world – for that kind of product at that kind of level. And all those people who bitch about Italy and say they don't like the fashion here – well, those British designers and the French designers still come to Italy to produce their product.

Hallelujah! And finally, on the eve of a new fashion week in Milan, how do you feel about the prospect of it?

I always start fashion week in the hope that it will be the most surprising thing I have ever witnessed in my career. I never come here with a blasé attitude; if I started to think like that I would do something else professionally. What keeps me interested is the excitement of seeing something new, something made differently, something that makes me change my opinion, or simply, something that makes me think.

Part II
Paris
September 25, 2018

Although it's only six months since *System* last sat down with Angelo Flaccavento, it feels like an eternity. Such is the relentless pace of fashion's current inter-season activity, the hirings and firings within the industry, and the brooding influence of world politics beyond clothes and the catwalk.

With Gucci shifting its Spring/Summer 2019 show location from Milan to legendary Parisian nightspot Le Palace, it was in the French capital that *System* reconvened with Flaccavento for another chat. Fresh from attending Milan fashion week (which he summarised in his Business of Fashion wrap-up feature with the opening line, 'Milan fashion week keeps suffering'), it felt like another ideal opportunity to hear some opinionated opinion.

It's been a season since we last spoke. What does a fashion season actually mean these days?

Of course, the very concept of the season is breaking up, but these big fashion months still feel like the pillars of the whole year, when everybody from the industry gathers. That's why I think it would be dangerous if the fashion calendar collapsed and was replaced by isolated moments driven by the big powerhouses themselves. They obviously have the resources to fly people to whatever location they want. So, for me, fashion week is like a security net for the smaller brands, because the journalists and buyers they want to meet are already in town and just a short drive away.

With so much activity and so many collections now generated in between each season, how does this change your journalistic perspective?

Well, the interview you and I did was barely six months ago, yet it feels almost prehistoric. So many things have happened and changed since then. The clothes I saw on the catwalk back then are only finally now arriving in the shops, but they feel like they were created in a totally different era, and now we are in the future.

What's the most significant thing to have happened in Italian fashion since we last spoke?

It's the fact that Gucci chose to show in Paris last night, and not in Milan. That might sound like I'm being flippant, but when the announcement was made I felt it was twofold. On one hand, everyone went into desperation mode, thinking that international journalists wouldn't bother coming to Milan at all, because Gucci is so clearly the current leader of Italian fashion. But on the other hand, I felt that this gap in the Milan calendar would provide an ideal opportunity for the other houses to really step up and take the stage from Gucci. In the end, this didn't happen. Which says a lot about the fashion in Italy right now.

We talked the last time about Italianness and what it means to be an Italian fashion house today, and I see that Zegna has acquired Thom Browne and Michael Kors is acquiring Versace…

…Italian brands buying American brands, and vice versa. The cards have been completely reshuffled. And yesterday's Jacquemus show got me thinking about Italy's rapport with its own fashion identity. The Jacquemus show was called *Riviera*, an Italian word, and was held in the Italian Embassy in Paris. I felt it was quite a naff and vulgar take on something that is profoundly Italian. For many people, when you think of Italian fashion you think Roberto Cavalli, which was basically the evolution of what Gianni Versace was doing in the 1980s and 1990s: a woman who projects her power through her body, which the clothes allow to be exposed. Perhaps Italians are led to believe that this specific 1980s aesthetic is now vulgar or no longer relevant, so we have built up a kind of self-imposed resistance to pushing that kind of fashion. But then you see an up-and-coming French designer who is respected by the press, replicating this exact thing in a rather clichéd manner.

Beyond who's doing it, don't you think it's interesting that someone is pushing that particular aesthetic in 2018?

There's certainly an interesting tension when you consider that 1980s Italian fashion – the overtly seductive woman, not covered in fabric – is so at odds with today's broader societal shifts surrounding female identity and image.

Could that style return as a widespread fashion phenomena in this age?

I don't think there is one current designer in Italy who's thinking about a woman who wants to project a beautiful and powerful and modern image of herself into the world. Neither covering herself up and trying to be avant-garde, nor being vulgar. Rather being modern and not nostalgic in a glitzy, Balmain thigh-boots and stilettoes kind of way. I feel that that this is a niche that someone could occupy. And I think Italian designers could be very good at that.

You recently wrote in your Business of Fashion Milan fashion week round-up that: 'Italian fashion designers don't do concept, they do product.' Why do you think that is?

The Italian fashion industry was founded on the notion of product, and a working structure that transformed ateliers into factories. The whole narrative of the fashion *maison* – and the concepts linked to that – is an entirely French construct. As an Italian, I've always admired how French houses have cultivated and protected their own brand 'shrines'. The house always comes first. Just think of the Dior grey or Chanel's double Cs. Everything is so very considered as part of the brand's long-term identity.

Which is such a considered thing now for any house, any brand.

Absolutely. Brands always talk about

'We love Miuccia's crazy fashion, but Prada's core is its shop clerks dressed like bourgeois teachers: pleated skirts, cardigans, and men in suits.'

'What happens if Alessandro Michele wakes up wanting to do an all-black, no-decoration collection for Gucci? I have a feeling his CEO won't allow that.'

Dress by Alberta Ferretti, Spring/Summer 2019.
Camisole, bow with hairnet, lace thong from stylist's archive.
Earring from David Roy.

Giorgio Armani, Autumn/Winter 2018.

Dress, camisole, underwear, belt, shoes, socks and headpiece by Prada, Spring/Summer 2019.

Dress and necklace by Versace, Spring/Summer 2019.
Shoes by Francesco Russo Spring/Summer 2019.

their DNA, which I find rather offensive because that term has been hijacked as a marketing tool; brands cheaply wanting to own things, to stake their claim to colours and so on.

Do you think the bigger the house gets the more it requires ownership of its DNA?
Yes, absolutely. Which is why I'm generally a fan of smaller brands because smaller means more able to adapt to any given circumstances. My feeling is that when a brand gets very big, the finance really gets into the design studio. The other day I was thinking to myself, 'What happens if Alessandro Michele wakes up one day and wants to do an all-black, no-decoration collection for Gucci?' I have a feeling his CEO won't allow him to do that.

public is very aware of what's in front of their eyes.

Give me an example.
I mean, the public spends so much money on a Supreme T-shirt. But I think the public knows what the real worth of that T-shirt is, and that it has nothing to do with classic perceptions of 'quality'. We are all aware that the price tag reflects the scarcity of supply and how cool Supreme is perceived to be right now. As public consumers, we are consciously investing into these elements of that brand, that phenomenon.

How do you think that has affected the idea of value for money, something that's rooted in the Made in Italy label?
This might sound very 'old world', but for me, today the value-for-money ele-

is a highly inclusive idea of style. That's what feels authentic about Gucci. And paradoxically the more the Gucci show is piled up with meaning and theatre and references, the more authentic it is because it reflects inclusive fashion as the antidote to imposing total looks.

It's fashion as merchandise to choose from.
Yes, and that is intelligent and honest. You can take away all the separate elements, which is very important to the whole Gucci narrative; the visual merchandising in the shop, everything is broken down into pieces. At the Gucci show all the candies are assembled into a kind of cake, with tiers of different candies. But in the shop the candies are separated so you don't get a sugar overload – you can just pick out the

'Diet Prada's moralistic journalism feels like the medieval *gogna* [stocks], where they exposed people who were guilty of something to public contempt.'

The word of the season is 'authenticity'. Everyone feels the need to shout about how authentic they are. Maybe it's fashion's collective attempt to combat today's fake-news era? But I can't help but feel that it's also an attempt to overcompensate and disguise the fact that fashion is increasingly driven by marketing.
Absolutely. When I hear 'authentic', the alarm immediately goes off and says to me, fake, fake, fake! It's like facial plastic surgery: the more inauthentic it is, the more it is served as authentic. Ironically, I think today's consumer is just as capable as the industry of sensing what is or isn't authentic. The fashion system continues to live in a bubble where we think, 'us and them'; where we can say whatever we want and think that the public consumer will swallow it. But the

ment in fashion has gone completely bonkers. With Hermès for example, you can *feel* that value for money is genuine, through its quality; in Italy, you spend a lot on Ferragamo because you can *feel* the quality is authentic. But in many instances, the marketing budget has replaced the craft and design budget. So value for money is based on marketing and messaging – illusions and belief systems.

Who would you say is the most authentic Italian fashion house today?
Prada is authentic for me. Armani in a way is still authentic. Gucci is authentic but in different ways. I don't feel people are buying into Gucci because it projects absolute quality as a fundamental part of the brand experience. And that's fine. Because what they are projecting

one thing you want and make your own cake. I think that is very modern.

Is that the secret to Gucci's current success?
I think what makes it a winner is that it is so transversal; it speaks to very different demographics. Alessandro Michele has been innovative in mixing these different Gucci worlds: one is very ladylike and bourgeois – suits and pussycat bows, pleated silk skirts, things my mother would wear – another is sweatshirts, sneakers and T-shirts for the kids, which also appeals to the high-street guy who wants to feel elevated.

Footballers and royal families can both wear Gucci. It is impressive.
Yes. This is very new. It is like an emporium within just one brand. And there

are almost no seasons: you go into the shop and they are supplying new stuff all the time, there is this endless renewal. It is very fluid now.

Why do you think Gucci came and showed in Paris?
This is a good question. I don't know what the reason is, and I still wonder if it will be a definitive move or just a temporary move, you can never tell.

Besides saying that it was the third part in a 'French trilogy', there didn't seem to be an obvious reason.
Maybe for once Alessandro Michele wanted to feel like a real auteur, coming out from behind the scenes, because Paris is the capital of fashion. I don't know why. If they'd wanted to have a collection rooted in alternative 1960s

has been. In Paris, there are the big names, but they are not so huge that they fill every corner of every room in fashion. People who look at Italian fashion are so mesmerized by the power of the big brands that they ignore anyone newer, younger, smaller, the brand that's in the corner. I think that is very Italian. I am so uplifted when I look at the British editor in chiefs at the shows; they are generally aged 25, 27, 30. You look at my side, the Italians, and I am 45 and I am one of the younger writers working for the newspapers. The ladies who work for the newspapers – with all respect – are still there after 30 years.

Do you think that is based on the classicism of Italian hierarchy that we discussed last time?
Absolutely, it is based on the fact that

version of this. Why? I think that the competition should push you to do better. It's like they are taking themselves out of the competition just to stay safe, and that is the worst thing you can do. It comes back to what I was saying earlier about the gap created by Gucci leaving the Milan calendar. Why does no one have the desire to fill that gap?

What can you do in your role as a commentator to help initiate some level of progress?
That is my biggest aim, honestly. Of course, as you can imagine I get a lot of response to what I write because I am quite outspoken. Sometimes that response is just anger, sometimes it is just, 'I don't agree with you', which is perfectly fine. I don't think I am God and I don't think what I say is the abso-

'When I hear brands using the term 'authentic', the alarm goes off. Like facial plastic surgery: the more inauthentic it is, the more it's served as authentic.'

and 1970s theatre – because they paid homage to those two avant-garde artists [Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo[23]] – they could have easily done that in Milan. There is the Piccolo Teatro Strehler, which is like the shrine of experimental theatre, or there is the Teatro Pier Lombardo, which is a much nicer structure than Le Palace in Paris.

Again, in your Business of Fashion Milan wrap-up piece you wrote: 'Don't get me wrong: Armani, Prada and Dolce & Gabbana have big businesses, and have earned their stripes. These brands are at the very top because they deserve it. Still, they should not completely dominate the scene.' But surely the very nature of industry is that one seeks domination.
Absolutely it is like that and it always

the family ties are still very strong, you are still a son or a daughter, even if you are in your 70s.

You wrote in your show review that young designers this season felt shackled, restricted, neither loose nor experimental.
Yes, I don't know why. I think at some point they just give up trying to be brave. Honestly, I was disappointed by these relatively young designers who I believe in, like Marco de Vincenzo. He has a language and style that is basically already his own – he is doing psychedelic ladylike wonderfully, with colours and with decoration that's not just patches, but built in the fabric. No one else is doing that. It's a volume that could be turned up to maximum or down to minimum. But then he just does a really flat

lute truth. But when I get messages from designers or their design teams, saying, 'You made us think', for me, I made a point. What I think is killing our system is the system of power, the big houses dominating everything and basically telling you what you can and can't write, because that is what they do. It is killing the system because if there is no free critical thinking, then there is no progress.

That feels like a difficult thing for fashion businesses to swallow.
Well, it brings me back to your earlier question about fashion weeks. If fashion weeks break down into individual fashion house events, this kind of progress cannot happen. Because if I am flown to New York or wherever it is in business class, put up in the swankiest hotel, treated like a prince, and then at

Dress by Valentino, Spring/Summer 2019.
Shoes from stylist's archive.

Dress, shoes, leather choker, shell necklace and tights by Gucci, Resort 2019.
Earring by Buccellati.

Jumpsuit by Schiaparelli haute couture, Autumn/Winter 2016/2017.

Dress by Valentino, Spring/Summer 2019.
Shoes from stylist's archive.

the end of it all I see a show that I don't like, how do I behave? Of course, I will try to be as honest as possible, knowing that my opinion will cut me away from the opportunity of being invited to the next one. So basically, we are creating a system that is a tyranny in which the big brands control everything.

How do Italian readers of your reviews react to your candid tone and opinion?
What makes me upset is when Italian readers who read me think I am anti-Italy. They think I'm critical of everyone, but they think it is a preconception for me to be harsh on Italian fashion. In Italy, we do unbelievable things in our factories. The whole of the fashion industry would be nothing without Italian factories. Because all the big brands produce all the best stuff in Italy – Hermès, Chanel, everybody. My anger is born out of this exact consideration. I think we *could* be the best in the world, but we don't have the balls to take centre stage. We have allowed the system to believe that we are boring and unchallenging.

You mean, Italian fashion is accepting its role as a service provider.
Absolutely.

To Parisian fashion.
Yes, I remember a moment in the 1980s and 1990s when Milan was considered bigger and better than Paris. These days, we no longer have the courage to try anything new. This season is a demonstration of that.

What would it take to revive the spirit of that time now?
I don't know because I don't see an escape from our political situation.

You see it as linked?
I think it comes down to the Italian mentality for everything. It is like we have given up being leaders. We are just followers and we just accept the status quo because the Italian intellectual left wing has been too elitist. So, they detached themselves completely from the wider public and that left the conservative voice to become the most heard. We have a word in Italian *qualunquismo,* which I don't know how to translate… when political apathy allows the common thought to take the lead.[24]

Which is the general dynamic of the planet right now, Trump, Brexit…
Exactly. So if I think about Italians who have been so innovative – from Gio Ponti to Roberta di Camerino to Walter Albini to Gianfranco Ferre – and then consider what's happening right now, I get so upset because Italy was the place where the progressive concept of prêt-a-porter really boomed.

More so than France?
Yes, because France continues to operate with a kind of couture mentality – the houses, the *maisons*, like we were saying before. They are always projecting the image before the product. I think that the fascination of a quilted Chanel bag comes from it being Chanel, more than it being a functional object. The success of Italian fashion came from it responding to needs.

Can you give me an example?
The success of Armani tells it all: he gave women the uniform that they needed in that very delicate moment in history when women were gaining a new kind of awareness and gaining success in the work place. Mr Armani thought OK, she cannot go in a shirt dress, because it is a male-dominated world. I will dress her like a man, but not exactly like a man because it is soft. That was his intuition responding to a social need with clothing, and that is very Italian because we are very practical. It's like what I was saying about us being good at product and not concepts. Because sometimes concepts can be just abstractions. Product responds to a need.

One thing I'm curious to know – how do you feel about the recent rise of platforms like Diet Prada?
To be honest I find it completely narrow-minded because they often focus on some detail and forget the bigger picture. This kind of moralism is like in the medieval era, in Italian, it is called *gogna*, the place where they exposed a person who was guilty of something to public contempt.

In English, they were called the 'stocks'.
That is what this kind of moralistic journalism does. And regarding issues that are clearly very sensitive, like cultural appropriation, I think there has been too much discussion done in a purely superficial manner. Creativity is based on appropriation; it always has been. In the past, designers made trips to lavish and far-flung places and said, 'Oh, I love that hair style, it's really inspiring'. In a way, yes, this is appropriation, but if you are being so highly moralistic about this then you are denying progress, because progress is based on appropriation on a global level. The Romans were the biggest travellers and they incorporated everything. They incorporated Greek cultures completely.

'Big houses basically tell you what you can and can't write. It's killing the system, because if there is no free critical thinking, then there is no progress.'

That's civilisation.
Whereas now, it is like we want *everything* to stick to the moral rule books. But if you do that then you might as well have a computer doing it – you can just programme the response. If it's right, it's right; if it's wrong, you cannot pass. Besides that, I find that this moralistic journalism is done mostly using social media, and that feeds the culture of hate in contemporary society. This culture of hate completely denies the right of the other person to speak and to have a conversation, to try to find a middle ground, and to maybe find a meaning to things. Today's culture of hate often dictates that: 'You are guilty. You are exposed in public. And there is no redemption.' It makes me fearful for the future. Social media may have been an interesting instrument of our times, but it makes me think that maybe it is the smartphone, not the television that George Orwell's Big Brother was prophesising.

Coming back to your own writing, do you keep in mind the reality of the livelihoods of the people behind what you may be critiquing?
That is why I like the backstage visits because it humanizes what I'm writing about. We must never forget this side of fashion. Also, sometimes, my opinion towards a designer's collection is very prickly, but then the next season it is very warm. I don't have my favourites and my dislikes. There are some who naturally correspond more to my personal taste: Rei Kawakubo is a favourite of mine in terms of taste, but I never go to her show thinking this will be wonderful no matter what. I've liked a lot of her shows, but there have been others I've not liked at all. And I write that.

How easy is it to keep an open mind, when it comes to reviewing a designer or a house whose style is the antithesis of your own tastes?
It's absolutely possible. In the past, there have been Cavalli shows that I have really loved. I mean, Roberto Cavalli is the complete opposite of my personal taste and I've never really got that super-glitzy glamour-puss woman. But I've often found that vision and those shows really beautiful, just as offerings of showmanship and craftsmanship.

What motivates your own sense of wanting to cut through to something which is honest and direct?
My biggest hope is that my words are like little seeds planted in people's minds: maybe they don't bloom right away, maybe they bloom in, like, five years. Maybe a designer or someone is thinking about what I wrote; they might not agree with it, but maybe it caused a reaction that leaves them thinking or reconsidering what they do. That is my biggest hope and ambition. As a writer, you are generally alone, deep in your words and your computer screen. Nothing more. So when I click 'send', I never know what's going to happen next. It's no longer for me to say. But I just hope that someone somewhere might stop to think, just for a minute.

1. Giovanni Battista Giorgini (1898-1971) was an Italian aristocrat, businessman and promoter of Italian arts and fashion. On February 12, 1951, he invited nine North American buyers to his family home at Via dei Serragli 144 in Florence for what is now considered Italy's first-ever fashion show. Guests – who were 'invited to wear clothes of purely Italian inspiration' – were treated to work by Carosa, Fabiani, the Fontana sisters, Marucelli, Noberasco, Schuberth, Simonetta, Vanna, and Veneziani. (Emiliano Pucci is often said to have been part of the event, but he actually showed separately at his own palazzo.) The show became a regular event and by its third year was being held in the Sala Bianco at the Palazzo Pitti. Giorgini continued to promote Italian fashion until his retirement in 1965.

2. The Palazzo Pitti held the first large-scale shows for buyers of Italian fashion in the early 1970s. Out of those shows grew Pitti Immagine, a collection of fashion trade shows or which the biannual Pitti Immagine Uomo is now the world's most influential menswear and accessories show. The Palazzo Pitti no longer hosts the shows, which are now held in Fortezza da Basso, a Renaissance-era fortified complex.

3. Before his death aged 42 in 1983, Walter Albini had been fêted by fellow designers, been called the Italian Yves Saint Laurent, become one of the most important pioneers of ready-to-wear, and helped found Milan fashion week. A handsome dandy who understood the power of image, he began as a fashion illustrator in Milan and Paris, before designing collections for a number of labels and his own ready-to-wear and couture label.

4. The Società del Giardino is a gentlemen's club founded in 1783 and located at Via San Paolo 10 in Milan. Housed in the Spinola Mansion, built between 1562 and 1597, it contains a 12,000-volume library and a renowned fencing hall first opened in 1882 that has the motto 'terribilis pravis – tutissimus bonis' or 'relentless against the wicked, a safe haven for the honest'.

5. Caffè Florian in St. Mark's Square in Venice is the self-proclaimed 'oldest café in the world', opened on December 29, 1720. Walter Albini held his Autumn/Winter 1973 show there in April 1973; it began with six wedding dresses. Outfits in the collection, which contained both menswear and womenswear, were named after Venetian doges and nobles.

6. The Giardini Pubblici Indro Montanelli is Milan's oldest park, opened in 1784. It used to be home to Milan's zoo, but this was closed and for the most part dismantled in 1992. Legend has it that some of its former residents can now be found, stuffed, in the city's natural history museum.

7. Cinecittà is Italy's most famous film studio. Located in south-eastern Rome, it was founded in 1937, a key part of the fascist government's attempts to create an Italian film industry. It became known as 'Hollywood on the Tiber' in the 1950s and 1960s as a number of high-profile US productions were made at the studios, including *Quo Vadis* (1951) and *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965). It was also used by Italian directors including Vittorio de Sica, Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti and Federico Fellini. During the 1970s and 1980s, production declined, but the studios were saved from closure by TV productions. The 1991 Eurovision Song Contest was also held at the studios.

8. In *American Gigolo* (1980), written and directed by Paul Schrader, Richard Gere stars as a male escort ('the highest paid lover in Beverly Hills') accused of a murder he did not commit. The website Clothes on Film says the film is, 'a vapid expression of style without substance that has somehow become an academic's favourite. Yet to argue the emptiness of the film and its bland protagonist as subtext is to miss the big picture: *American Gigolo* is not even about its protagonist; it is about what he wears. *American Gigolo* is about Armani.'

9. *Working Girl* (1988), directed by Mike Nichols, is a Cinderella story set in the world of New York finance in the late 1980s. Today, the film is perhaps best remembered for Carly Simon's anthemic song 'Let the River Run' that plays over the opening credits and won the film an Academy Award.

10. Avedon's images for Versace were collected in a book entitled *The Naked and the Dressed: 20 Years of Versace by Avedon*, first published in 1998.

11. The Paninari were a group of middle-class Milanese teenagers who, in the mid-1980s, began dressing in Timberland boots or deck shoes, Levi's 501s, and brightly coloured Moncler down jackets. Essentially a rejection of Italian parochialism, the group – which took its name from a local sandwich shop – were obsessed with the speed of modern life as symbolized in fast food and US pop culture. The movement received its own theme song in 1986 when the Pet Shop Boys released 'Paninaro' with its lyrics: 'Girls, boys, art, pleasure / Girls, boys, art, pleasure / Paninaro, Paninaro, oh, oh, oh / Food, cars, travel / Food, cars, travel, travel / New York, New York, New York / Paninaro, Paninaro, oh, oh, oh / Armani, Armani, A-A-Armani / Versace, *cinque*.'

12. Frida Giannini was Gucci's creative director from 2006 until January 2015.

13. Michele was appointed by Gucci CEO Marco Bizzarri.

14. Kiton, whose name comes from the Greek word *chiton* or tunic, was founded in 1956 by tailor and fabric merchant Ciro Paone in Naples. The company specializes in men's ready-to-wear, particularly men's suits; it offers an exclusive made-to-measure service, because, as Paone has said, 'Everyone dreams of the sea, but not all dream of the same sea'.

15. Adriano Goldschmied is widely credited with introducing the concept of 'premium denim' and in the process changing the denim market forever. In the 1980s, he founded the Genius Group that at one point included Diesel, Replay, Goldie and Bobo Kominsky. It is now based in Los Angeles and called Genious Group.

16. In 1999, Marco de Vicenzo, then aged 21, started at Fendi, where he still works; he founded his own label in 2009.

17. Born in Bergamo, but now based in Milan, Lucio Vanotti launched a first label, February, in 2002, and his current eponymous label in 2012.

18. Albino Teodoro is designed by Albino D'Amato who created the label in 2004. Arthur Arbesser launched his womenswear label during Milan Fashion Week in February 2013.

19. The photograph of the designers standing in front of Milan's Duomo can be seen on the opposite page.

20. According to the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana, the Italian fashion industry had revenues of €64.8 billion in 2017. In comparison, the automotive sector had revenues of around €80 billion.

21. It did. On June 15, 2018, Missoni announced that state-controlled private-equity fund Fondo Strategico Italiano (FSI) would pay €70 million to acquire 41.2% of the company.

22. Missoni is 65 years old: Rosita Missoni founded the company with her husband Ottavio in 1953. She remains the company's honorary chair.

23. Leo de Berardinis was a radical Italian theatre director and actor who for over a decade starting in the late 1960s worked with the actress (and his partner) Perla Peragallo, often reinterpreting Shakespeare and other classics in productions such as *Sir and Lady Macbeth* (1968) and *King Lacreme Lear Napulitane* (1974). In 1971, the pair moved to Naples and opened the Teatro di Marigliano – also known as the Theatre of Ignorance – where they worked until the couple split in 1981. On June 16, 2001, de Berardinis fell into a coma after a botched anaesthesia before a plastic surgery; he died in September 2008. Peragallo had died aged 64 in August 2007.

24. The Cambridge Italian-English dictionary translates *qualunquismo* as 'political indifference/apathy'. The Hoepli Grande Dizionario Italiano defines the word as: 'A political movement of the immediate post-war period that, claiming to support the aspirations and the interest of the common man, proposed a form of state with purely administrative and bureaucratic functions, opposed the presence of political parties and of all ideologies.'

Photographer's assistants: Mickael Bambi, Luca Baldini; Stylist's assistants: Tourikí Dexter, Ashland Massoumi, Margherita Tamrac, Maria Bonfa. Models: Lizy Marcus at Elinor Shahar; Talia Ferralis at Elite, Giulia Zollet at The Lab, Clarissa Colombo, AliceSofia Navarin, Roberta Netto, Vera Facchin, Francesca Nicoletti. Hair stylist: Gary Gill. Hair assistants: Tom Wright, Chris Gatt, Maria Paparone. Makeup artist: Thomas de Kluyver. Makeup assistants: Lauren Reynolds, Tonia Calzerano. Body painter: Leonardo Borgese. Digi tech: Victor Gutierrez. Production UK: 360PM. Head of production: Laura Grant-Evans. Producer: Lana Saffiti. Production Italy: Lumen Lab. Executive producer: Emanuela Matranga. Assistant producer: Sibilla Morgantini.

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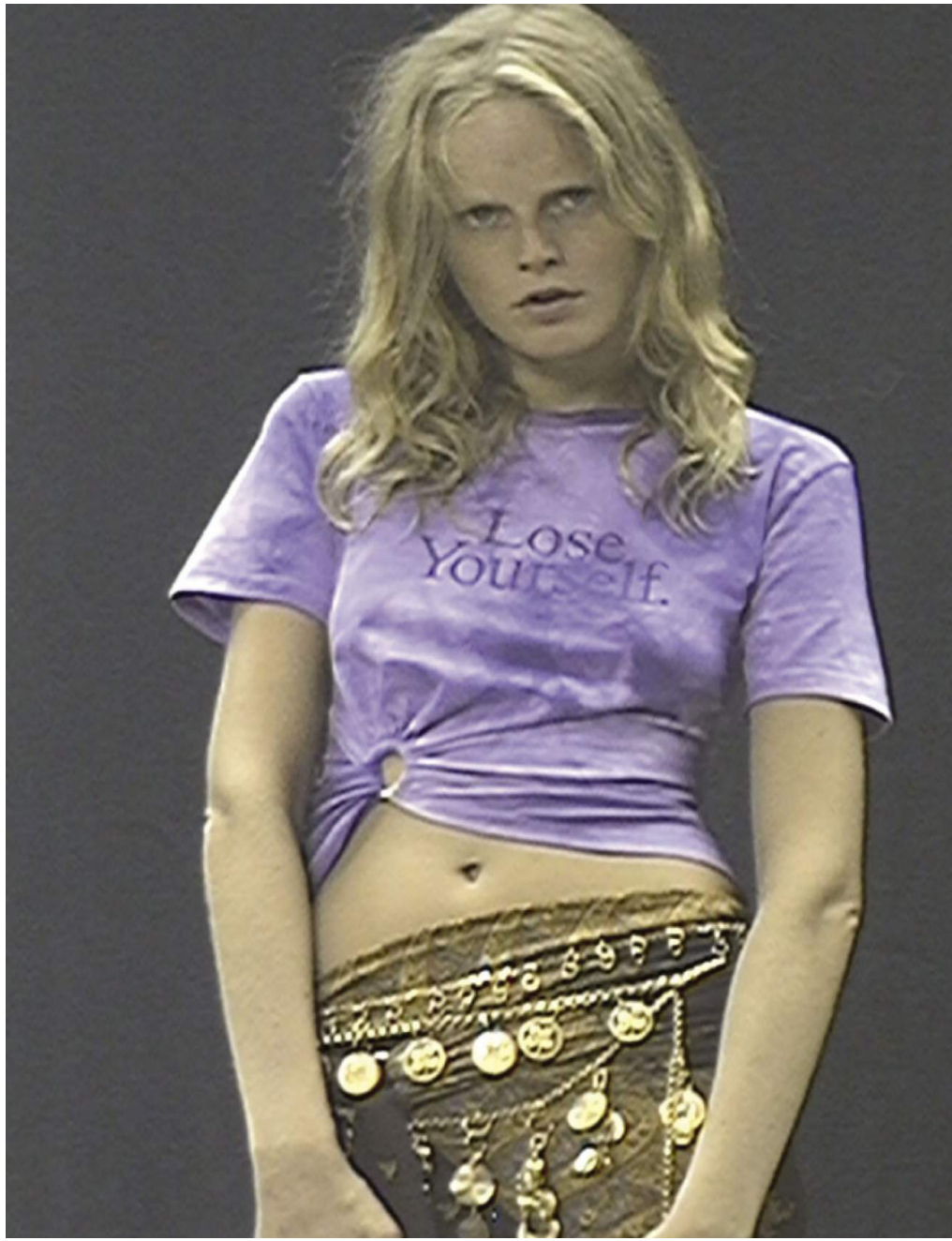
Left to right: Laura Biagiotti, Mario Valentino, Gianni Versace, Krizia, Paola Fendi, Valentino, Gianfranco Ferre, Mila Schön, Giorgio Armani, Taj Missoni, Franco Moschino and Luciano Soprani. Photograph by Dan Coxe for *Capital International*, 1985.

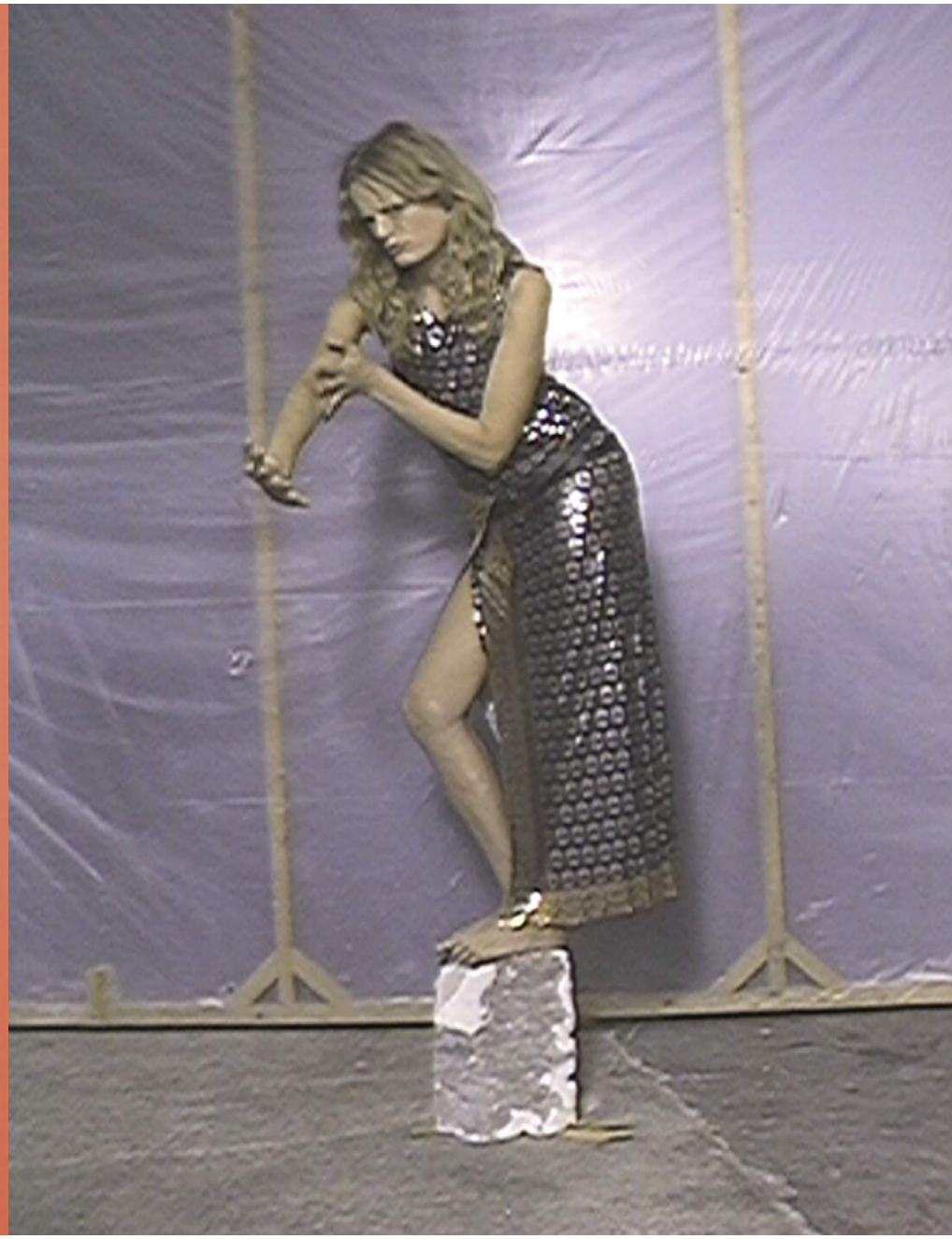
BALENCIAGA

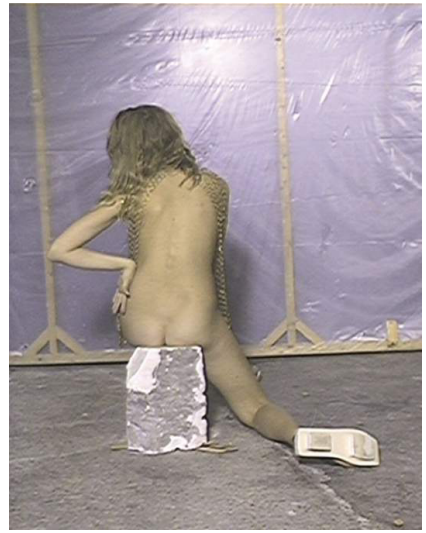
‘It’s a fantasized reality, but a reality nonetheless.’

Designer Julien Dossena and art director Marc Ascoli discuss their ‘reanimation’ of Paco Rabanne.

Interview by Marta Represa
Photographs by Sharna Osborne
Styling by Francesca Burns







All clothing Paco Rabanne Spring/Summer 2019 collection.

Talent: Hanne Gaby Odiele. Photographer's assistants: Jodie Herbage, Milly Cope. Stylist's assistants: Bianca Raggi, Emma Simmonds. Make-up artist: Niamh Quinn. Make-up assistant: Libby James. Hair stylist: Gary Gill. Hair assistant: Tom Wright. Nail artist: Pebbles Aikens. Production: 360PM. Casting: Barbara Nicoli and Leila Ananna. Photography in the London studio of Daniel Silver, represented by Frith Street Gallery.

For over 30 years Paco Rabanne meant pizzazz. It meant sexy. It meant creativity. But by 2013, when French designer Julien Dossena arrived at the house, Paco Rabanne needed bringing back to life. His reanimation strategy – surprising to some – was not to attempt to out-Paco Paco or go wild with the archives, but rather to return to the heart of the house's mission with the question: what can Paco Rabanne bring to modern femininity? From there, and a beginning with a newly introduced line of underwear, Dossena has set about quietly rebuilding the brand from the ground up, repositioning it, without removing its soul, trademark touches and poised panache. This sensitive refashioning of the Paco Rabanne woman has been growing in confidence with each collection and reached a wonderful crescendo in Dossena's highly praised Spring/Summer 2019 collection. All beautifully made chic bohemian layering and eye-popping patterns, it presented, for example, the house's classic shimmering chain mail updated, softened, printed and brilliantly blended into tops and skirts.

Alongside Dossena throughout the process has been legendary art director Marc Ascoli, bringing the expertise and experience amassed over a long career creating some of fashion's most unforgettable images for the likes of Yohji Yamamoto, Jil Sander and Martine Sitbon. Julien and Marc sat down with *System* to discuss how the Paco Rabanne woman is always evolving, Françoise Hardy's 25-kilogramme dresses, and how fashion is as much about observing as making.

Let's start by talking about how you first met and began working together.

Julien Dossena: I had the idea of working with Marc almost right away. Paco Rabanne is such a unique brand in the Parisian landscape – for the clothing, of course, but especially in the way Paco viewed femininity – that from the beginning I found myself thinking of Marc's images for Yohji Yamamoto and Jil Sander.[1] There were two pictures in particular I couldn't let go of: Amber Valletta in a black dress having her makeup removed by two hands, and Amber Valletta against a flaming red background wearing a camel coat.[2] They were exactly my idea of beauty, of something extremely refined, which fitted in perfectly with my concept of the Paco aesthetic. Back then, we hadn't met yet though.

Marc Ascoli: True, but I did know your work. Marie-Amélie Sauvé[3] had asked me to come see one of your first shows, and I was immediately intrigued. Actually, now that I think about it, I had already seen one of your collections before she mentioned you.

Julien: You were at my second show.

Marc: It was the one in the small room at the École des Beaux-Arts. And for the record, I immediately felt that you wanted to be both extremely simple and really radical, yet at the same time you were so clearly on a quest for beauty. And not just any kind of beauty, but a renegade, androgynous one, where shoes were the most important part of the silhouette and soft fabrics clashed with chunky ones. It felt compelling right away, like you were creating a cool sense of femininity for the product, but also creating very distinct characters. Your women were timeless, elegant and serene, but they also showed a streak of rebellion. I liked that.

Julien: My very first concern when I started back in 2013 was how I would express femininity through my clothes, even before I began delving into the house's archives. I wanted the Paco Rabanne woman to be strong, militant, active, liberated from any sort of cuteness or coyness. We've been working from there ever since, really.

What has been the best part of working together over the past five years?

Julien: More than anything else, it's been about doing the research and progressively becoming more and more precise with our vision for the brand. Finding the right balance between the house's heritage, our clients' needs, and fulfilling our own creative vision is a never-ending job, but that's what I enjoy the most about it.

Marc: Plus, in our work, it's all about creation, never about destruction. And especially about creating a relationship with the women we dress. Never by putting them on a pedestal, but by sparking a real dialogue with them, getting to know them intimately so we can find common ground and an intellectual and emotional affinity. That's how you really get to understand the evolution.

Julien: Absolutely. Observing women is a constant for me. Which is strange in a way, because I grew up thinking I wasn't any different from them. As a kid, I actually felt closer to them than to boys. It wasn't until we were all teenagers and my friends started getting their

'When I started in 2013, I immediately wanted the Paco Rabanne woman to be strong, militant, active, liberated from any sort of cuteness or coyness.'

first boyfriends that I noticed the difference. That's when I started observing and finding out how I could contribute to their lives. At the end of the day, that's what ties together all our creative vision and our team effort. And, of course, there is a lot of hard work and organization behind it all.

Marc: Sometimes spontaneity creates interesting results, but as a general rule each project needs a lot of preparation. Our jobs, contrary to what some people might think, are not about showing up with our hands in our pockets and smoking cigarettes on set. They require an enormous amount of research and analysis, even more so nowadays, considering the amount of information we have access to.

Has that changed the way you work?

acquiring a purely cultural patina. Shows look more and more like pop concerts, and yet clothing has never been more closely analysed and intellectualized. But, when all is said and done, designing is what really occupies 90 percent of our time, which is why you won't find many people with families or in long-term relationships in the industry. And regarding what you were just saying, Marc, it took me a while to grow out of that 'whatever style' and realize that fashion was far from frivolous. But I think that idea has a lot to do with the patriarchy, and its dismissal of fashion as 'girly'. It has begun to change with women taking control of more aspects of the industry.

Marc: There is also so much more money in it now.

Julien: Which of course is also interesting to straight men!

the public. Frankly, if a designer already feels under pressure before his second show, I can guarantee that show will fail. The horizon needs to be wider than simply fast money, otherwise designers will – and do – suffocate, no matter how talented they are.

Julien: I was lucky enough to land at a brand where fashion had been nonexistent for decades, where I was able to build everything from scratch in order to create what I imagined a modern Parisian house should look like. That allowed me to take my time and choose a team that truly shared my principles. And it's funny how things evolve almost without you noticing, because, looking back, I remember having a very precise, sharp idea of the Paco Rabanne woman as being extremely athletic, which was in tune with the times a few years

'The best career advice I was ever given came from Nicolas Ghesquière when we were working at Balenciaga, and it was, quite simply, 'last'.'

Marc: Yes, and I actually think it has made the industry more interesting in a lot of ways. Of course, there are some things I find outrageous, particularly the idea that anything goes. I call it the 'whatever style': when you are discussing the clothes' technical details and people answer 'whatever', before changing the subject and talking about the latest exhibition in town. That is not how you achieve quality. True, fashion designers are no longer just clothing suppliers as they were in the 1950s; there is now a real industry, which creates global interest. But that doesn't mean that we can ever forget the idea that what we are making, primarily, is clothes. That should be our priority.

Julien: Fashion has become a pop-culture staple over the past few decades, while at the same time paradoxically

Marc: When I started working, €200 million in turnover was beyond anyone's expectations. Today, it's a mid-range performance for a mid-sized company.

Julien: And it concerns us creatives, too. We used to be appointed because of the style and identity we could bring to a brand. Now, one requirement when you're hired is guaranteeing a large turnover.

Designers are now often under tremendous pressure to turn brands into giant moneymaking machines in fewer than three seasons or risk being fired. That doesn't seem to be the philosophy here.

Marc: Designers are long-distance runners, not sprinters. As a brand, you need to give it time if you really want to create a feeling of connection with

ago. That's why one of the first things we came up with was the sporty underwear with a logo, what we called Bodyline, which quickly accounted for 20 percent of our turnover. Which, in turn, bought us two years to experiment and evolve towards what the brand is now. Economically building a brand is a journey, and always a bumpy one, so a solid foundation is essential rather than relying on random collections or being the industry's new darling. Because at the beginning, we are all the new darling, regardless of our style. And in 80 percent of the cases, it ends badly. The best career advice I was ever given came from Nicolas Ghesquière when we were at Balenciaga, and it was, quite simply, 'last'. It was very much on my mind when talks with Puig[4] started, and I think we have been on the same page since.

Marc: As an art director who has worked closely with designers for decades, I can tell you my job depends enormously on understanding their creative vision for the brand. Which inevitably requires time and reflection on their part, too, mixed with endless curiosity and a will to surrender to reality and to catch the zeitgeist.

It's quite the balancing act, isn't it?

Julien: Definitely. We often talk about a designer's creative evolution, but we forget to mention the public changes, too. It's a designer's responsibility to stay in tune with his or her audience and to change according to it. It's a permanent conversation, and your audience needs to be ready for anything you present them.

Marc: To me, great fashion is the self-

all things esoteric, his incredibly democratic spirit…

Speaking of which, the pricing in your collections seems extremely eclectic. Is that another nod to Paco's heritage?

Julien: Exactly. When I talk about him being democratic, I'm talking about his DIY paper wedding dresses sold with French *Elle* back in the 1960s. I wanted the brand to remain accessible to anyone entering the shop, whether it's a 15-year-old with pocket money buying a yoga bra or a 50-something CEO or artist looking for a coat. Our price range can go from two figures to €10,000 for a metal-mesh dress encompassing all the savoir-faire of the house. But that mesh dress is just one aspect of the business, because once you have one, that's it, you'll never buy another

recognizable aesthetic with which the viewer feels comfortable. No striking, bombastic statements or punchlines here. Just an artistic still life, sometimes also inhabited by characters, and a laser-focused colour palette. Something the public would like to be part of.

Julien: It's a fantasized reality, but a reality nonetheless.

Marc: Otherwise nostalgia kicks in, and that's the danger for a heritage house like Paco Rabanne.

How do you work together?

Julien: Like everything else, it has been a long-term project for us. I think on our first meeting we discussed what the brand meant to each one of us, and I talked Marc through my creative vision, the product and the woman I wanted to reach, while of course, taking the indus-

'These days, fashion shows look more and more like pop concerts, and yet clothing has never been more closely analysed and intellectualized.'

evident relationship between personality, talent and timing.

Julien: Yes, otherwise you run the risk of creating something completely unsuited to its time, as awesome as it might be. And even if, by chance, it clicks, it's like a one-night stand, whereas you need to build a relationship.

Does that mean you knew how the brand would evolve from the start?

Julien: Not in a Machiavellian way, but yes. I knew that the first thing was to catch the eye of a clientele that would understand the brand, and then to take it on a journey. Everyone, particularly in English-speaking countries, had a very precise idea of what Paco Rabanne was, the disco metal-mesh dresses, 'wacko Paco', and all that. But there was so much more to him: his love of

one. I find the mix of styles and the idea of comfort much more interesting than cocktail dresses. Which is why in my last show you can see looks combining, for example, a €490 bias-cut skirt with a €170 T-shirt and a €7,000 piece of body jewellery.

Marc: Each garment has its price. I've never understood the whole €350 for a T-shirt thing.

Julien: I just don't find that modern. If creating a brand is today a global endeavour going well beyond the clothes, you need to be inclusive. And speaking pragmatically, I wanted to lure in the sort of clients who would never otherwise set foot in the shop.

That's also where the image-making comes in…

Marc: *Voilà*. It's about creating a very

try as a whole into consideration. That was when we decided that shooting models was not necessarily a must, and we really wanted to evoke the idea of a certain woman.

Marc: It was not just a woman; it was also a character with her own life. As viewers, we observe who she is through how she lies on a sofa or the way she puts her shoes on the floor. The idea being always that this woman is not just some fantasy. She really exists, which opens the door to an intimate relationship between the viewer and our work. To get to that, we usually start by each working on a moodboard, then comparing and adjusting them, and choosing the rest of the team. Above all, we strive to be coherent with what we've previously created, and to achieve a certain balance between spontaneity and,

even if this word seems to be banished from fashion nowadays, finesse. Not everything in the world is about cool. Refinement matters, too, more and more lately. We've kind of overdosed on streetwear.

Julien: We'll never entirely agree on that one. [Laughs] I still think you can work on streetwear, but it needs to be elevated. It needs to be an inspiration, not the be-all and end-all. Again, it's all in the equilibrium between reality and fantasy.

Marc: And the whole team also plays a crucial role in that. I can't stress how important Marie-Amélie is in our projects. Her career and her vision have been defining for us all. And, of course, Paris. Working on one of the biggest avenues in the world for luxury, where customers and the industry expect collections of the highest level, is a real privilege. And it's something I always remember while working. In that aspect, there's nothing casual in my work.

Julien: True, we all understood the potential of the name Paco Rabanne the minute we got here.

Attached to the name is a very particular idea of femininity, and what Parisian women stand for.

Julien: I think it's quite old fashioned to contemplate a woman as a sort of fictional figure. Personally, I have never fantasized about women like that. I've been fascinated by real Parisian women, though – creative, hard-working and full of character – and I continue to try to give them the tools they need to be more… I hesitate to use the word 'comfortable', because it means such different things. Some women find comfort in a corseted, armour-like silhouette; others in oversized proportions and soft fabrics. To me, comfort is anything that visually gives the impression of a strong, independent woman, while expressing the sensitivity that, to me, is the real strength of the feminine.

How has Paco Rabanne changed through the decades?

Julien: What I've always found most compelling about Paco is how he gave women the chance to reclaim their bodies. His goal was to make them happy, but he did it in different ways during his career. There was an evolution that started with the idea of Amazons, all-conquering females who filled the whole room.

Marc: It was the era for it, too. His competitors were Saint Laurent, Courrèges, Cardin, all with very different ideas of womanhood. I think he was reacting to the Parisian couture landscape of the time by designing all those suits of armour.

Julien: Which could weigh as much as 25 kilogrammes.

Marc: Françoise Hardy remembers having to be carried off the stage after her concerts because she couldn't even move under the weight of those dresses!

Julien: It might sound strange to say that he was respecting women while putting them through that, but he was offering them a brand-new sensuality, completely outside the established forms in the Parisian landscape and beyond.

Marc: He was also very inclusive.

Julien: Exactly, he was one of the first designers to put a black model on the runway.[5]

Marc: It was not so much about Paco Rabanne's clothes as it was about Paco Rabanne's universe.

Julien: As a matter of fact, I'm not even sure that fashion in and of itself was his priority. I think he used it as a means to express a new, androgynous kind of femininity. And that's what I'm going for, too.

That androgyny, along with diversity, was particularly self-evident in the casting of the Spring/Summer 2019 show.

Julien: I've always really insisted on those two things for the casting for the reasons we've just mentioned, but also because I like to imagine a whole character to go with each one of the show looks. Which also explains why each model has different hair and make-up. I don't know if you remember those 'clone shows' where all the girls looked exactly the same?

Marc: All with the same little Alice bands and the same ballerina chignons, yes! So 2000s.

Julien: It's important to find the look that best suits each girl's body type. Add to that the model's attitude and personality, and you get a true narrative going for the show.

Marc: Not to forget the lighting; I loved all those orange lightbulbs.

Julien: They were supposed to mimic a neon-lit street in an Asian megalopolis, but they also had a sort of modern Moroccan design edge to them. They made the room warm in any case.

'Designing occupies 90 percent of our time, which is why you won't find many people with families or in long-term relationships in the industry.'

Marc: A certain pop star warned me about them before I entered the venue: 'Darling, it's too hot in there!' Thank God it wasn't winter, so the fur coats were nowhere to be seen. But yes, the set was good. So was the Serge Gainsbourg soundtrack.

Julien: I love how the music can help convey an aesthetic message.

Speaking of which, there was a clear mystical message in that last show. And as you said, we all know the Paco metal-mesh dress, but the esoteric, spiritual, almost hippyish Paco talking about his past lives and the end of the world is a lot less well-known outside of France.

Julien: True, and that aspect of Paco Rabanne was very much on my mind throughout the whole season. And I mean that in more ways than merely the visual one. His mysticism is clearly important to him, to the point that he has now dedicated his whole existence to it. It was always expressed through his work in different ways. He was the first fashion designer to explore that sense of spirituality through fashion and, in a way, his women were priestesses. In a nutshell, it was something I had wanted to do for quite a few seasons, and the timing was finally right to introduce that lesser-known Paco to the audience.

It worked – the show was included in all the season's best-show lists.

Marc: It was? I think that calls for a toast. Time to open some Champagne!

1. Marc Ascoli art directed campaigns and promotional material for Yohji Yamamoto and Jil Sander in the 1980s and 1990s, 'discovering' photographers including Nick Knight for Yamamoto and Craig McDean for Sander.

2. The images were taken by Craig McDean for Jil Sander's Autumn/Winter 1995-1996 collection.

3. Marie-Amélie Sauvé is a Paris-based stylist. She has collaborated with Nicolas Ghesquière since 1997, first at Balenciaga and now at Louis Vuitton, and created the biannual publication, *Mastermind*, in 2017.

4. Puig, founded in 1914, is based in Barcelona and specializes in fashion and fragrance. It purchased Paco Rabanne in 1987 and has since introduced a number of successful perfumes under the brand name. Puig also owns Jean Paul Gaultier and Nina Ricci.

5. Paco Rabanne first used a black model in 1964. The designer told Barbara Summers for her book *Skin Deep: Inside the World of Black Fashion Models* (1998) about the backstage aftermath: 'I watched them coming, the girls from American *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. "Why did you do that?" they said. "You don't have the right to do that, to take those kind of girls. Fashion is for us, white people." They spat in my face. I had to wipe it off.' While a number of designers have claimed to have been the first to send a black model down a Paris runway, Pierre Bergé was characteristically certain who it really was. 'Back then, the first black model was at Yves Saint Laurent,' he told French magazine *Jeune Afrique* in 2014. 'Before him, no one had used a black model in France! Yves Saint Laurent started with Fidelia in 1962.'

‘BodyMap was a movement.’

Stevie Stewart and David Holah’s 10-year BodyMap adventure is an unlikely story of 1980s London, style as performance, hedonistic times, the inevitable comedown, and a fashion legacy that’s never felt so modern.

By Tim Blanks
Photographs by Oliver Hadlee Pearch
Styling by Vanessa Reid

Previous page: Edie wears *Is a Comet a Star, a Moon, a Sun aura Racoon?* (Spring/Summer 1986)
This page: Jo wears *Barbee Takes a Trip Around Nature's Cosmic Curves* (Spring/Summer 1985)

Nella wears *Square* (Spring/Summer 1991)

Kakua, Heather, Hirschy and Pan wear
Raw Dishcloth and Oilskins (Autumn/Winter 1983)

Opposite page: Yebeen wears *Is a Comet* a *Star, a Moon, a Sun aura Racoon?* (Spring/Summer 1986)
This page: Olympia wears *Barbee Takes a Trip Around Nature's Cosmic Curves* (Spring/Summer 1985)

This page: Mica wears *BodyMap-ism* (Spring/Summer 1987)
Opposite page: Louise wears *Half World* (Autumn/Winter 1985)

This page: Georgia wears *Barbee Takes a Trip Around Nature's Cosmic Curves* (Spring/Summer 1985)
Isla wears *Half World* (Autumn/Winter 1985)
Opposite page: Mischa wears *Raw Dishcloth and Oilskins* (Autumn/Winter 1983)

Opposite page: Veerle wears *The Cat in the Hat Takes a Rumble with the Techno Fish* (Autumn/Winter 1984)
This page: Finn wears *Olive Oyl Meets Querelle* (Spring/Summer 1984)

Opposite page: Veerle, Paul and Pan wear *Olive Oyl Meets Querelle* (Spring/Summer 1984)
This page: Amy wears *Half World* (Autumn/Winter 1985)

Olympia and Nicolas wear *Olive Oyl Meets Querelle* (Spring/Summer 1984)

Misha and Pan wear *Life Is…* (Spring/Summer 1990)

This page: Heather wears *The Cat in the Hat Takes a Rumble with the Techno Fish* (Autumn/Winter 1984)
Nicolas wears *Barbee Takes a Trip Around Nature's Cosmic Curves* (Spring/Summer 1985)
and sock from *Is a Comet a Star, a Moon, a Sun aura Racoon?* (Spring/Summer 1986)
Opposite page: Youn wears *Half World* (Autumn/Winter 1985)

Opposite page: Martina wears *Barbee Takes a Trip Around Nature's Cosmic Curves* (Spring/Summer 1985)
This page: Duke and Joe wear *The Cat in the Hat Takes a Rumble with the Techno Fish* (Autumn/Winter 1984)

This page: Joséphine wears *Is a Comet a Star, a Moon, a Sun aura Racoon?* (Spring/Summer 1986)
Opposite page: Andrew, Youn, Hen and Luka wear *The Cat in the Hat Takes a Rumble with the Techno Fish* (Autumn/Winter 1984)

This page: Yebeen and Tyrus wear *Is a Comet a Star, a Moon, a Sun aura Racoon?* (Spring/Summer 1986)
Opposite page: Joshua, Veerle and Finn wear *Life Is…* (Spring/Summer 1990)

This page: Scarlett wears *Is a Comet a Star, a Moon, a Sun aura Racoon?* (Spring/Summer 1986)
Opposite page: Jess wears *Tudors, Stewart and Holah* (Autumn/Winter 1986)

Opposite page: Ethan, Robbie and Paul wear leggings from *Moon* (Autumn/Winter 1990) and dresses from *Love Ball NY* (1990)
This page: Edie wears *Life Is…* (Spring/Summer 1990)

This page: Nella wears *Secret Seduction* (Autumn/Winter 1987)
Opposite page: Mica wears *Barbee Takes a Trip Around Nature's Cosmic Curves* (Spring/Summer 1985)

Hirschy wears *Half World* (Autumn/Winter 1985)

Sue wears *Is a Comet a Star, a Moon, a Sun aura Racoon?* (Spring/Summer 1986)

Opposite page: Paul wears *Barbee Takes a Trip Around Nature's Cosmic Curves* (Spring/Summer 1985)
This page: Allegria wears *Life Is…* (Spring/Summer 1990)

This page: Pippa wears *The Cat in the Hat Takes a Rumble with the Techno Fish* (Autumn/Winter 1984)
Opposite page: Kiki wears *Is a Comet a Star, a Moon, a Sun aura Racoon?* (Spring/Summer 1986)

Navigation: Russell Marsh. Director of photography: Errol Rainey. Photographer's assistants: Jack Day, Mitchell Stafford, Bella Sporle. Stylist's assistants: Ewa Kluczenko, Kyanisha Morgan, Hannah Ryan. Hair stylist: Cynda Harvey. Hair assistants: Blake Henderson, Reve Ryu, Shanice Noel. Makeup artist: Thomas de Kluyver using Maximalisme de Chanel and Chanel Sublimage Strengthening Essence. Makeup assistants: Thomasin Waite, Carly Lim, Anastasia Hess. Set designer: Alice Kirkpatrick. Movement director: Les Child. Casting director: Adam Hindle. On-set production: James Ward. Personal archive kindly provided by Stevie Stewart and David Holah of BodyMap. Shot at Spring Studios, London.

Talent: Mica Argañaraz at Viva, Luka Badnjar at Wilhelmina, Martina Boaretto at Viva, Youn Bomi at Premier, Duke and Jo Brooks, Edie Campbell at Viva, Olympia Campbell at Viva, Scarlett Cannon, De-reece at AMCK, Josephine de la Baume at Tess, Ethan Domaradzki at Supa, Finn at Linden Staub, Paul Hameline at Success, Pan Haowen at Elite, Misha Hart at Viva, Joshua Hillman at Storm, Hirschy Grace at The Squad, Kakua at Premier, Jo Kelley, Heather Kemesky at Viva, Veerle Klok at Elite, Jess Maybury at Elite, Robbie McKinnon at Supa, Andrew Nelson at Storm, Nella Ngingo at Paparazzi, Amy Orchard King, Tyrus Orchard King, Georgia Palmer at Storm, Nicolas Ripoll at Models 1, Isla Rose at Bonnie & Betty, Sue Tilly, Louise Toohey, Allegra Torassa, Kiki Willems at DNA, Pippa Brooks, Hen Yan at Viva, Yebeen at Elite.

Everyone knows that Katharine Hamnett was wearing her '58% DON'T WANT PERSHING' T-shirt when she met Margaret Thatcher at 10 Downing Street in 1984. No one knows that BodyMap's David Holah met the PM at a similar event sporting a fuzzy racoon hand puppet on one hand; an unfazed Thatcher shook the designer's other hand.

The BodyMap saga is full of similarly vivid, playful, anarchic details that posterity has consigned to a cultish twilight. That's not right. In the 1980s, the rise and fall of David Holah and Stevie Stewart defined the way the world saw British fashion: the Brightest Young Things, brought down by Big Bad Business. But if the form of the saga was a cliché, the content was anything but. More than three decades on, BodyMap still has the capacity to dazzle – and touch. That's because, at its heart, it was a love story, so intense was the connection that Holah and Stewart shared. They still do.

Today, he's teaching printmaking to a new generation; she has a thriving career as a costume, set and production designer. Upstairs from her flat, though, there's a room where BodyMap lives on in a thousand scrapbooks and a thankfully thorough archive of clothing. What's remarkable is how little of it says 'then', as is clear from the images that accompany this piece. Holah and Stewart anticipated the future, not just in their blend of style and sport, but in the all-embracing attitude of their presentations at which all ages, sizes, genders and inclinations were served up in a celebratory stew. They made a uniquely modern family. It endures.

The Beginning

Stevie Stewart: Do you know about our stall at Camden Market? I started doing the market when I was 15. I was one of the first people to have a stall there. I was selling feather earrings. They took off, so I was selling designs to [jewellers] Adrien Mann[1] and doing illustrations for another accessories company. Then I started going to Middlesex Polytechnic, and I'd gone from feather earrings to hair accessories and punky badges. I sort of went from hippy to punk. And then I met David on the first day of college and he started helping me on my stall, selling things like punk badges and Stephen Rothholz jewellery.[2] He used to do titanium metal and plastic tubing bracelets. Very 1980s. In the end we got him to do the sunglasses for our collections.

Tim Blanks: How old were you on that first day of college when you met David?

Stevie: Twenty-two, I suppose. It was 1979.

Tim: Oh, I thought students were younger.

Stevie: David and I had been outside working. I didn't get onto the foundation course at Barnet College because it was full up, so instead of waiting and wasting another year, I went on a three-year diploma in design course there instead. One year was like foundation, the next year was fashion and graphics and in the third year, you specialised in fashion. I got a grant. It must have been when I was 18 to 21, so I would have been 22 when I started Middlesex Polytechnic.

[*David arrives in a gust of good cheer*]

Tim: Hi, David, how are you? Such exuberance!

Stevie: We're trying to work out dates. I was just saying how I met you at college. My best friend was Melissa Caplan[3]…

David Holah: …and she was my flatmate, and she told both of us to look out for each other. We actually met each other at Southgate station on the line to Cockfosters…

Stevie: …on the first day of college. And that was it. Best friends ever since.

David: It was like we'd known each other all our lives.

Tim: Funny that you had never met before.

David: I'd been doing my foundation in Oxfordshire, I had just moved to London, and I was looking for places to live, which was how I ended up at the Warren Street squat with Kim Bowen.[4] She was temping up in the West End, and we were in college digs, up in Turnpike Lane. She saw this huge place, so lots of us could live there, and it became a really pivotal place. There were lots of parties. The Scala[5] down the road showed lots of avant-garde films, and there were lots of parties there, too. Divine would go there.[6] But the house got overcrowded and Melissa invited me to come and live with her, so that's how…

Stevie: I was living at my mum's in Barnet, but I would go and stay in David's room on the end of his bed.

David: Yeah, on the end, because there were already people like Lesley [Chilkes][7] and whoever else in there. There were quite a lot of us in just one bed. From Warren Street, we were moved into council houses because we were homeless when we got kicked out. So there were all these groups of flats.

'Warren Street squat was huge, with the insane atmosphere that comes from 20 ultra-creative people creating looks for going out in at night.'

Lesley Chilkes: *Warren Street was huge, with the insane atmosphere that comes from having 20 ultra-creative people creating looks for going out in at night, and all the shenanigans around that. That was basically all we did. I met David through my sister, who was at college with Kim [Bowen] and Lee Sheldrick,[8] and we're still best friends 40 years later. He was a beautiful little creature – hugely loved by everybody. Kim absolutely adored him. We're incredibly lucky, because we created a family then and we still are one today.*

Stevie: It was a different time, wasn't it? If you wanted to live together, the council would rehouse you in hard-to-let flats. There was that policy.

David: So we got a four-bedroom flat with Jeffrey [Hinton] and [Princess] Julia[9] and everybody. We were all in the same block.

Tim: What did you do at Middlesex?

Stevie: Because I'd done the diploma in design, I wanted to go somewhere that was more creative and of a higher standard, like a proper course. And I'd been to Saint Martins and I didn't like it.

Tim: David, why did you go Middlesex?

David: Because I'd wanted to go to Saint Martins and [course leader] Bobby Hillson[10] interviewed me and I got refused. I don't know why.

Tim: How did you look in those days?

David: Well, Quentin Crisp[11] was my inspiration, so I had curly red hennaed hair and a hint of makeup. I was quite pretty. I had a very good portfolio. Anyway, it was all very alarming that I didn't get in.

Tim: Had you been a punk as well?

David: I ombré-ed between punk and Quentin and soul-boy, all of them rolled in with a Bowie-esque edge. The whole gamut really.

Stevie: I had a side ponytail.

David: She used to get up at four in the morning to get ready for college. She had the whole look going on. Hairdos…

Stevie: When I started, I had my hair in a side ponytail and had some sort of big, graphic, 1980s T-shirt that was white with a knot at the side. I had some purple tracksuit trousers – like leggings, but tracksuit material – some court shoes that I'd dyed, and yellow fishnet socks.

Tim: Were other people doing this?

David: Everyone had their own thing. I was a Quentin-meets-punk kind of thing, and Stevie was a sort of space princess. A compilation of all kinds of things, a bit like BodyMap, really.

Stevie: On the stall, we were selling army surplus, dead stock, and cotton flannelette pyjamas, which were a bit Mao suit-y. We bought that business from Jenny and Joan, a couple who started the first Body Shop stall after Anita Roddick's Brighton stall, so they had huge success. Their stall was next to me when I was selling the accessories, and they also had an army surplus stall inside the Shed, as we called it at the time. And when the Body Shop stuff started taking off, they lost interest in the army surplus and we said, 'Ooh, we'll have that!' The pyjamas came in pale blue and we would take them to college and get Dave the Dyer, the dye technician, to dye them in vast numbers. We would sell loads of them. We had black, purple, fuchsia pink, turquoise, with a little stand-up collar. No frogging, just poppers.

Tim: So quite institutionalized.

Stevie: Yes. They were prison pyjamas.

Tim: And then people styled them up themselves?

Stevie: We used to style them up for them. We had these cut-out, flat, 2D mannequins which we would haul up on top of the stall every Saturday and Sunday, and we would style them… And David had started selling this thing called the 'chemise,' which was like a cowled shift dress with long sleeves.

David: Yeah, it sort of crumpled down, with long sleeves you pushed up. I wore it all the time. It was a college project, inspired by a Jean Cocteau film. I can't remember the name. He had a very whimsical, very drape-y feel going on, so I made the dress with the drape. And they went like hot cakes. I've never known anything like it.

Stevie: Probably Gerlinde Costiff[12] wore one, and then [store owner] Susanne Bartsch[13] saw it…

David: …and then we all wore them. Men, women, any colour you wanted, tie-dye, dip-dye – the whole gamut. I gave [journalist] Anna Piaggi[14] a silk organza one that we'd made for a show in London. She wore it and styled it in her own way and did this whole number on it.

Stevie: But anything we did at that time flew off the shelves. Like the rope belts that I was doing…

'My look ombré-ed between punk and Quentin Crisp and soul-boy, all of them rolled in with a Bowie-esque edge. The whole gamut really.'

David: We were just selling stuff. It was just a stall. It was our extra cash on top of our grants.
Stevie: Well, I didn't get a grant. That's the whole reason I became entrepreneurial.
David: So she could pay her college fees.

Tim: Did you have a sense of there being something about to happen?
David: We were on the brink. From college, we were already doing stuff with my chemises and Stevie was doing her hemp-linen deconstructed jackets. I sold my chemises to Kensington Market, originally. My brother Eric had a stall there with his stuff and Stevie put her jackets there, so then we had two outlets in London. Then [collector] Louise Doktor[15] and her husband Terry were quite influential.

Tim: How much of this stuff did you sell?
David: Thousands. Lesley had a full-time job cutting and making those dresses.

Tim: Were you getting press at this time?
David: *i-D* and *19*, yeah. Just individual stuff. I don't think *The Face* had started at that point. *i-D* was doing loads of stuff about Camden, so we were in the pictures; it was more of a fanzine at that point.

Tim: Did you both graduate when you left college?
Stevie: Got a first, darling.
David: After college they wanted us to go to either Paris or Milan to work in fashion, like at Lagerfeld, or somewhere…

Tim: At this point you're still not BodyMap, so what was the ambition?
Stevie: We were wanting to fill a niche!

Mikel Rosen:[18] *I was teaching at Middlesex Polytechnic when [PR agent] Lynne Franks*[19] *got together the first London fashion week at the Commonwealth Institute.*[20] *David and Stevie were in their second year and they helped me. David's degree collection was very Valentino, very grand and camp; Stevie's was more utilitarian. They were totally different collections. We were telling David to go to Valentino, and when he came back with no work, I said to them, 'Why don't you work together?' I loved the idea of that combination: something classical with something ethnic; this gay boy David and this fag hag Stevie putting things together. That's what kept it going. If they'd only done club clothes, it would have had no depth. And I brought Hilde Smith from the textile department.*[21] *Without her prints, I don't think BodyMap would have taken off.*

'After college they wanted us to go to either Paris or Milan to work in fashion, like at Lagerfeld or Armani, or somewhere...'

Stevie: Because they bought my stuff and your stuff and Eric's stuff. I remember saying to you: 'David, there's a niche in the market and we can fill it.' That was when we started putting our designs with the pyjamas.

Tim: What niche was that? Were your individual aesthetics kind of different and compatible, or were they really similar?
David: There was nothing else like that happening in the fashion world. I suppose it all just happened because we were at the market and we knew we could sell there, because people were buying it. We had great market research. Then it started to take off with Susanne buying our stuff and selling our clothes in her shop on Thompson Street in New York.

Tim: Where did they want you to go, Stevie?
Stevie: Armani. We kind of did an investigation into going to one of them. We didn't really go, though. We met some fashion people; we hung out in Milan. But before we actually left college, when we were in the second year, we did this show called *In Town Tonight* and everyone else had already graduated so we were the only ones still there. It was people like [designers] Stephen Linard[16] and Stephen Jones[17] – that big class two years above us. A whole group of up-and-comers. David did the chemise collection and I did my long coats and jackets in linen.
Tim: It was like your Armani audition.
Stevie: It was much more distressed and Japanese-y. I got Japanese guys to model it and David had his topknot.

The Middle

Stevie: Our first collection together was called *Matelots and Milkmaids*. And we sold that. Robert Forrest[22] made an order for about £3,000 for Browns.
David: We like to skip over that bit.
Tim: Why?
Stevie: It was an experimental phase.
Tim: You mean that was the first time you tried to synthesize your individual aesthetics and it didn't work?
Stevie: Well, it did work because Robert bought it. But in hindsight we much preferred what we did afterwards.

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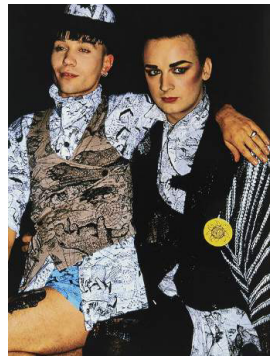

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1. Stevie Stewart at her Camden Market stall, c.1981.
2. David Holah, Jackie, David H., and Michael Clark, date unknown.
3. David Holah and Stevie Stewart, Paris, c.1988.
4. David Holah and Boy George backstage at the post-show party for the *Isa Comet…* Spring/Summer 1986 collection, London
5. Opening of the BodyMap shop in the Isetan department store, Tokyo, 1985.

Robert Forrest: *I loved meeting Stevie and David. BodyMap wasn't like anything else. We take it for granted now, because people do it all the time, but it was the first time people had their friends as models, doing the hair, doing the makeup. It was young and fresh and energetic. And it was real sportswear, with interesting, inventive cuts and great prints. I thought it was right for Browns because it was different and we could give a wider audience to it. It was the same time that Norma Kamali[23] was taking off with all the sweatshirt stuff. Then, just after I left Browns, [owner] Joan Burstein[24] bought Galliano's graduate collection right off the catwalk in June 1984, and Diana Ross was waiting outside the shop to buy John's dress in the window when it opened. She must have been staying at Claridge's.*

David: Yeah, it was sort of stretchy with a soft tailoring feel.
Stevie: Like putting our college collections together.

Tim: The fluidity of David's chemise with your more tailored structure…
Stevie: I was more into oilskin parkas and those sorts of things, from college.
David: What we did at college wasn't really similar. I couldn't sew very well, so I just made things that could be slipped on. They were big and baggy and a belt made them fabulous. I was all big circles and squares, but Stevie could sew, so she could structure and make intricate things.
Stevie: I knew about pattern-cutting because of my Barnet College days, although my coats were quite simple, like long A-line coats.

dressing. It could fit a lot of people, and you didn't have to do the sizing. You could pull a skirt on and look a million dollars, but it was just a sweatshirt skirt really. It was all about the fabric and the cut. It was sexy. It made you look good. You felt good.
Stevie: We wanted to try something with Lycra, and going round the fabric fairs and visiting agents we discovered this Swedish company that added Lycra to its knits, because it made childrenswear and socks. Weirdly, they'd got all the knitting machines that made the ribbing and the socks from Leicester. And we went on working with them to make new fabrics for us – heavier sweatshirting with cotton Lycra, more viscose-like. And that made us think we could turn this into a business. That we could conceptualize it and do it properly.

'I loved the idea of that combination: something classical with something ethnic. If they'd only done club clothes, it would have had no depth.'

David: I would have loved it if Diana Ross had bought BodyMap! But Joseph[25] bought all the jumpers. I remember that we were cutting stuff, like that tartan suit and things.
Stevie: It was a collection we did for some sort of mid-season show; I think it was called *Circes*. We were experimenting with shapes and using this knitted dishcloth fabric. To get some shape, we started to use jersey, and we thought that looked better. So we were making toiles out of jersey for some of the stretch things and they looked really good, and we started incorporating them with sweatshirting. We wanted to buy all of our fabrics from England. Even the jersey was from Nottingham. And we had the tartan suits and hemp coats, which was a bit of an amalgamation of what we were both doing.

David: When it came to BodyMap, it was a mix of the two. Me not knowing, I would invent a shape from something and Stevie would discipline it.

Tim: So it wasn't like 'you do this one and I'll do that one'? It was actually a complete symbiosis? That is very tricky to pull off.
Stevie: We would take each other's sketchbooks and draw over each other's designs.
David: We could think about a look, about whether we did it this way or that way. We kept it all simple, so we could make things quickly, because it all became about how quickly we could make it. A lot of stuff didn't have any zips or buttons, it was all just a big pull-on. Those petal skirts were just held on with a tight rib. It was a new way of

Tim: Do you remember the moment you decided on the name BodyMap?
David: John Maybury,[26] who was my boyfriend, came up with the name. It was the title of a piece from the 1970s by an Italian artist called Enrico Job:[27] 2,000 photographs of a body laid out flat so that you can see the front and the back.
Stevie: So it's like a human skin.

David: A magazine – *19* or *Cosmopolitan*, I think it was – called us and said they needed the name of our company.
Stevie: And John had a whole list. He'd done a bit of research. I remember one of them was 'EarthWorks'.
David: And we were like, 'Where's that list that John compiled?' You were literally on the phone, weren't you? And you were like, 'What are we going to call ourselves?'

Stevie: We looked at the list, and we went '*That one!*' And I said: 'We're called BodyMap.' We never wanted our names, like 'Holah and Stewart'. We wanted an umbrella name, because even at that point we knew we wanted not just clothes but head-to-toe dressing: accessories, tights, sunglasses – whatever. And we were also starting a healthy lifestyle. We had lots of friends who were macrobiotic and we started doing our own cooking, which led to recipes being published.[28]

John Maybury: *When David and Stevie decided to do their thing together, they were looking for a name. At that time, my own work was all about performance and body art, reacting to stuff from the 1960s and 1970s. I'd been making my Super 8 films that had funny pre-*

lived in two other rooms, and we had an office in the living room. We were getting everything delivered: all the fabric was going up the stairs, while the boxes for the shops were going down.
Stevie: There was no lift.

Tim: I'm looking for eureka moments, like April 1983, when you were part of *New London in New York*.[30] [*Reading from a clipping*] 'Susanne Bartsch put on a fashion show featuring 20 of the newest, most outstanding British designers… I went to see it two days before the show in a rather decaying room of the Chelsea Hotel… It was chaos. Susanne was on the telephone, organizing chairs, spotlights, drinks tickets and four high stools for the makeup artists… doing it on absolutely no money at all. She had lots of friends

left my mouth hanging open. It was so fresh and vibrant.

Tim: What happened after New York?
Stevie: It made all the British press become aware.

Richard Buckley: *Those were the days when traditional British publications like* Vogue, Harpers & Queen *and* Tatler *never ran any images or stories about young London designers;* The Face *and* i-D *did. I was associate fashion editor at* Daily News Record, *and I'd already written a big story about the New Romantics, Spandau Ballet and the D-Mob designers when they'd been in NYC the year before. And I wrote these people up as well. They'd never gotten any publicity at home, but here they were getting lines in an American*

'It was a new way of dressing, and it could fit a lot of people. You'd pull a skirt on and look a million dollars, but it was just a sweatshirt skirt really.'

tentious titles. I was interested in Enrico Job. He'd drawn little squares all over his naked body, photographed it, and laid it out flat, like an animal hide. He called the piece Bodymap. *I said to David: 'You're doing these stretchy, athletic-y clothes. It's so perfect.' Everything they did was so intuitive and random. I came up with some other names – something to do with 'terra' was one, 'half world' was another – all of them drawn from artists I was influenced by at that time.*

David: When BodyMap started, John and I lived in Godwin Court and Stevie lived in Levita Court[29] in Ossulston Street, down the road in King's Cross. And that's where we started BodyMap, in Stevie's flat. Pattern-cutting in one room, machines in another, Stevie

among the designers. She opened a shop and wanted more things and more designers.' So Susanne showed Sue Clowes, Richard Torry, John Richmond, Rachel Auburn, Monica Chong and you, among others.

[Journalist] Richard Buckley:[31] *I want to say* New London in New York *was at the Roxy, that roller-disco place that was popular at the time. I don't remember too much from the show other than that I was sure I would love Sue Clowes. I'd already gone to see her earlier in London. She had a studio in Brick Lane, back before it was fashionable to be on Brick Lane. She did all of Boy George's outfits. But I was sort of disappointed. It was more of the same old, same old – but BodyMap and Leigh Bowery? Now* that *was something. It*

menswear trade publication. Remember, there wasn't social media or e-mail in those days. I had the London designers pretty much to myself in the US.

David: It was very well-received, when we came back from America the first time.
Stevie: And we felt we hadn't done anything.
David: Robert [Forrest] was like, 'You've done that there, why aren't you doing stuff here?'
Stevie: Then, in October, we were part of the Individual Clothes Show at Olympia.[32] That was when we showed the *Olive Oyl Meets Querelle* collection, which was the one that really made us realize we were doing something good. We got the Martini Award for being the most innovative young designers.

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6. Film still of *Barbee Takes a Trip* collection, Spring/Summer 1985.
7. Film still of *Barbee Takes a Trip* collection, Spring/Summer 1985, with Barry Kamen.

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8. Film still of *The Half World* collection, Autumn/Winter, 1985, with David Holah and Michael Clark.
9. Film still of the *Barbee Takes a Trip* collection, Spring/Summer 1985, with David Holah and Eric H.

David: It was a fabulous collection, when I look back at it. I remember [journalist] John Duka[33] was there. And he was literally going bonkers over it.
Stevie: Richard Buckley, too. They were sitting there, saying '*This* is London. *This* is what we've been waiting for.'

Richard Buckley: *I saw the* Olive Oyl Meets Querelle *collection at the first fashion week I did in London after moving to Paris in July 1983. In the mid-1980s, there was definitely something going on in London design-wise. There were so many young designers. On any Saturday you could go to Kensington Market and find someone who had spent the last week making clothes in their bedsit. Whatever they were selling always reflected what was going on in the clubs or, better yet, they were taking it one step further. It was all about the street and the clubs then. And the music. Fashion and music were so intertwined in the mid-1980s. Also, in those days every major design house in Paris and Italy was hiring students right out of Saint Martins or the Royal College of Art to come and work as assistants, because the students were the ones creating the trends. But what BodyMap did was very different to what everyone else was doing in London, especially as the look shifted away from the New Romantics. Their combination of an athleticwear aesthetic mixed with unusual silhouettes, colours and patterns made their clothes unique. Polymorphous is a good word for it, considering how the pieces were easily interchangeable, layered and even androgynous – it didn't make any difference if a man or a woman wore them.*

Tim: How long was your show slot?
David: Three or four minutes. We showed 10 looks and all the models looked *hot*! It was all girls who were on the scene at the time. Gary, our gay cleaner, was our Querelle,[34] and I was in it. We had the Querelle look, and the girls had the Olive Oyl[35] look. The styling was just *out there*! There weren't stylists in those days. We did it all: the earrings, the hats, the gloves. The whole thing, top to bottom.

Tim: The totality of the thing is immediately striking – it's like it landed on Earth fully formed.
David: I wish we had a film of that show. We just didn't have a camera. But our four minutes really made an impact. And afterwards, we all went off and sold on the stand.

Tim: Did you feel like everything had suddenly changed?
David: There was a buzz. An overnight sensation, I would say.

Tim: You were making the clothes in your flat?
David: Some of them, and we had the rest made outside in factories.

Tim: And the quality was good?
David: It was quite hard because people hadn't seen Lycra before, and the finishing of the hems wasn't always OK.
Stevie: Sometimes, when we look at the archive, we're a bit, like, 'Hmmmmm…' [*raises eyebrows*]. But the main thing was that we had to think about how we were going to manufacture, because we weren't backed by anyone and all the money was forward-financed. You had to have the money to pay for the fabrics and for the things to be made. We went from the £3,000 Robert Forrest order, and then the mid-season orders and the orders from New York for the dishcloth bits got us to £15,000. But with *Olive Oyl Meets Querelle*, it shot up to £85,000. That was one of the reasons we said yes to [fashion entrepreneur] Adriano Goldschmied.[36]

Tim: How did he come into the picture?
Stevie: When we first met him, he had the Genius Group working with Katharine Hamnett and Vivienne Westwood. So Katharine was designing the Goldie collection and she didn't want to do it anymore, and David Mantej from Diesel and Evelina Barilli[37] had taken over but Adriano wanted someone new. He knew Lynne Franks and that was how, practically overnight, we ended up in Italy. One minute we were in London, the next we were in Asolo. And I was like, 'Oh my God, this is where Dame Freya Stark[38] lived.'
David: It was really beautiful, but we were put in a box…
Stevie: …and we weren't allowed to see anyone else. Because Adriano had taken Dave and Evelina off Goldie and put them on Bobo Kaminsky,[39] and he didn't want us all to meet up. Then in comes Evelina, the pattern-cutting queen of Italy, our best friend from that day to this, and she takes the four of us to Venice and we all become friends.

Tim: Here's a 'new faces' piece from the *Sunday Express* magazine, January 15, 1984. The writer calls you 'BodyWrap'! [*Reads*] 'Cashflow is helped along by their first earner, a still-thriving market stall.' You're the 'new faces' of fashion and look who they chose for architecture – Zaha Hadid!
Stevie: Then the next show was in March 1984: *The Cat in the Hat Takes a Rumble with the Techno Fish*. We were the hottest ticket in town that season. It was our first solo show and that was when Lynne Franks started the Murjani tent at the Commonwealth Institute.[40] She'd been doing our PR since *Querelle*. We had the best slot: Friday at 7.30. We hadn't slept for days.
David: But because we'd done *Querelle* before that, we'd kind of set the pace.
Stevie: We used some of the best-sellers from *Querelle*: the petal skirt, the casual cardie, the one seam, some of the parkas and the sweep.
David: The iconic BodyMap looks.

Tim: What pressure did the success of *Querelle* put on you as you approached *Cat in the Hat*? Did you feel liberated by the sense that you now had an audience? Or did that scare you?
Stevie: Because it was our first solo show, we had to have a marketing plan and plan all the outfits.
David: Which we hadn't before.
Stevie: Well, we had, but this was a whole show.

Tim: So here you are, planning your first solo show, and you're the one everyone wants to see.
Stevie: When did Mikel Rosen come into all this? Was he helping already?
David: Yeah, he was.
Stevie: He got the dancing twins, Barry and Nick Kamen.[41] We knew Barry, and Nick came with him to the casting. We had our own auditions, do you remember? In the council flat on the third floor at Levita House, which was filled mostly with mad people and Asian families. And there were all the people queuing up the stairs, and we could only pay them a £75 clothing voucher or something like that, because we didn't have any money.
David: There were quite a lot of people in the show, but we had no idea where some of them had come from. Mikel found some good freaks.

Mikel Rosen: *Stevie found these two black guys tap-dancing on the Tube. I found the Kamens through [Storm Models founder] Sarah Doukas because Laraine Ashton[42] was representing them. Boy George was supposed to sing, but couldn't, so Helen Terry stepped in. We had people coming out from the right and left sides, five models at a time, the Kamens in boxer shorts. It was a totally different way of putting things on the runway: real people, no choreography, no running order. Jeffrey [Hinton] was bunging tapes in and out of the cassette machine. If models were going slow, he'd put on a faster track to make them move more. There were no headsets. I was signalling to someone in the doorway to send out the next models — all with hand signals! But that energy, and the prints, and the club-scene clothes is what the Americans went wild about.*

Tim: Did the models have to change?
David: Three times!
Stevie: In those days, you didn't do the one-outfit-one-model thing. You had to work it.

David: You had to come back and get changed for that £75 voucher!
Tim: Sounds like a long show. They were all long in those days.
Stevie: It was half an hour, maximum.
David: We had about 80 outfits and so much happening. And Jeffrey doing the music.

Tim: Do you remember the music?
Stevie: The theme song from *Flipper* at the end, because we were very conceptual! And Helen Terry at the beginning doing her *a cappella*, something like 'BodyMap presents to you – their first collection.' She came down the catwalk singing. She was with Culture Club at that point.
David: Then it was all just hits from the time that we loved. There was Eurythmics in there, I remember. It was all those fabulous songs of the time.
Stevie: People were fighting to get in. Lynne [Franks] had to manage that whole thing. She was wearing *Olive Oyl Meets Querelle*. I remember her standing up on a chair in the full outfit.

Tim: Was she encouraging the chaos to create an event?
David: Yeah. I think she made it into the thing it was. She squeezed in as many people as possible to get the vibe going. She was good at that. It was a real happening.

Tim: And you backstage, screaming?
David: Doing the outfit changes! I was making sure the outfits were getting put on the right way around because people didn't really know how to put these things on.

'Whatever they were selling reflected what was going on in the clubs, or taking it one step further. It was all about the street, the clubs, and the music.'

'The next show was in March 1984: *The Cat in the Hat Takes a Rumble with the Techno Fish.* We were the hottest ticket in town that season.'

Tim: And were you still with John at this point?
David: Yeah. John made this amazing backdrop with fish jumping.
Stevie: Everything was so conceptual. *The Cat in the Hat Takes a Rumble with the Techno Fish* describes our influences in that collection. We set ourselves a theme and that helped us to design. So, obviously, the Cat in the Hat[43] goes with the funny gloves and the stripes, and then the techno side was where we did the styles with the big mesh print. And *Rumble Fish* was a film that had just come out with young actors in it. It was in black and white except for the scene with the two fighting fish, which was in red and blue, and that inspired us to do mostly monochromatic with splashes of colour. From that concept, John painted a fish backdrop, Jeffrey played the *Flipper* theme at the end, and the models had fish-shaped stickers on their faces.
David: And one glitter eyelash. It was fabulously conceptual, and so polished. We did a shoot for ourselves to start with. Iain [R.Webb][44] came to draw the collection, so we got an idea of what it was going to look like with the makeup and hair. Because it was sculpted hair, and with the *Cat in the Hat* hats and all the other stuff, we had to know it was going to work.

Tim: And everything was for sale? All the hats and the gloves?
David: Everything. We did amazing sunglasses and they sold really well. Often, we would do a shoot beforehand.

Tim: Did you have rehearsal time?
Stevie: A tiny bit, so Michael Clark[45] could run through what the models would do. They just ran on and danced.

Tim: Who were the models who were most identified with your shows?
David: Susie Bick, Amanda Cazalet, Lucy Tear… Hilde Smith, who did all of our prints, was in all the shows, too. We don't know what happened to her. And Les [Child][46] is my friend, so he was in all our shows.

Les Child: *Yes, I did every show. It was quite overwhelming, I didn't realize I was so integral until after the fact. We were all very close. I was in Stevie's graduation as part of Masai, an all-black dance group. If you were good at singing or dancing, David and Stevie would try to use you in some way. They kept up that family spirit to the end. My fondest memory of the shows – and I was very lucid and together in those days* [knowing laugh] *– was the whole preparation: all these incredible children getting ready backstage, the madness, the excitement, the photographers all around the catwalk instead of just at the back. It was much more of a performance, with the audience screaming, ranting and raving. Very clubby. It was a constant party. We got so much attention when we went out that getting attention onstage was normal. People did things out of passion and love. If they got paid £50, they'd be excited: 'My God, let's go and get a drink.' Maybe it was an overflow from the 1970s, the sense of freedom and love. Maybe that comes with being young. But we just loved being out around people. It wasn't about money or who you were. No one had an agenda. The industry wasn't saturated with endless stylists, makeup artists, hairdressers, the way it is now. Now people have to have an agenda to get somewhere.*

Susie Cave (née Bick): *I fell in love with David Holah and Stevie Stewart at first sight! Michael Clark was wearing BodyMap, and he was dancing so beautifully and looked amazing. The clothes were very sexy, in a wild and wonderful way, with both boys and girls wearing the dresses. It was so different from anything I had ever seen. It was such an honour to be asked to model for something that was so risky and forward-thinking. But the atmosphere was that of a family, with great loyalty between them all. Lesley Chilkes did the makeup for the shows, and her mum was on the catwalk with Stevie's mum.*

'BodyMap shows were much more of a performance, with the audience screaming, ranting and raving. Very clubby. It was a constant party.'

Tim: After such a huge show – the last one, on Friday night – did you all go out and celebrate?
Stevie: Didn't we have to go and sell again? Or set up for the next day? We were very hands on.
David: I think we went and set up and went home, ready to sell the next day.

Tim: At that point, were buyers coming from everywhere because of BodyMap?
David: Before that there weren't that many buyers in London. We drew them back, and a lot of fashion press from abroad. Things started to really kick off for London again after that.
Stevie: With *Cat in the Hat*, there were nearly £500,000-worth of orders. We had to have money for manufacturing. We were, like, 'How are we going to afford to make this?' So we signed

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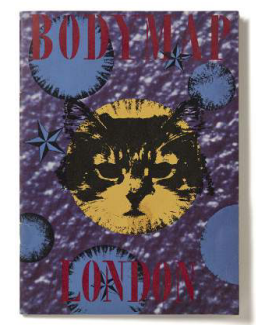

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10. BodyMap Christmas card, 1987.
11. Stevie Stewart and David Holah, photographed by Johnny Rozsa, London, 1988.
12. The BodyMap 'ups and downs' snakes and ladders game, featured in the *BodyMap* magazine that replaced a catwalk show, Spring/Summer 1991.
13. Cover star Bev the kitten on the *BodyMap* magazine that replaced a catwalk show, Spring/Summer 1991.
14. Illustration by Colin Barnes for a BodyMap feature in *The Sunday Telegraph*, 1983.

an American licence deal and a Japanese licence deal, and at the same time we were doing Adriano and Via Vai,[47] weren't we?
David: It was a huge amount of money in those days, and so much money went to paying for BodyMap. We were making quite a lot, but we ourselves literally didn't have any money.
Stevie: We paid ourselves £50 a week.[48]
David: That's what we lived off, and I think we paid our rent out of it. But, you know, I was in a council flat so it wasn't much money. In those days £50 was quite a lot. We were never earning masses of money, but we were living the lifestyle for the next few years, getting on planes to New York and Japan and Italy every other weekend. We never stopped.
Stevie: And after *Cat in the Hat* came the next collection for Spring/Summer 1985: *Barbee Takes a Trip Around Nature's Cosmic Curves*. This was where we had all the models changing on stage, so we had backstage onstage. It was all a topsy-turvy concept.
David: And we probably pushed the boundaries just a bit too much, with the people changing in front of everyone. We did these amazing nylon Lycra swimsuits that were totally ahead of their time, but people just thought it was S&M bondage gear.
Stevie: They were just Lycra, like American Apparel. I think they thought it was PVC. But people still use it today. It is still *the* swimwear fabric.

Tim: Was this show less mad?
David: No, there were tons of people.
Stevie: And we sold lots as well.
David: We just got really dissed for it. The American press turned on us. We went from being the sweethearts of fashion to being the demons. Models were smoking on the runway; the girls had bald heads or big Afro wigs. It was quite 1960s-inspired. All the boys wore girls' clothes and all the girls wore boys' clothes. Stickers on nipples, bosoms out… It was quite a rad show.

Tim: A big change from the one before?
David: *Huge*! It was really out there. I mean, I thought it was amazing.
Stevie: It was at the Natural History Museum, Friday, October 12, 1984, at 7.30.[49]
Tim: A very specific memory! Did the show feel like a natural evolution?
David: People didn't respond as we thought they would. We were pushing it a little bit, but nothing that you wouldn't expect. We did have some PVC aprons, like bondage aprons. The American market just took it the wrong way, really. My five-year-old niece who was always in the show was a beautiful little baby and she was always naked, but people were getting changed near her and the Americans didn't like it.

Mikel Rosen: The Cat in the Hat *was such a thing that they thought for the next show: 'We'll take the back wall away and show everyone what goes on backstage.' So I had this gang of 70 kids backstage – some with no-hair, skullcaps, some with huge Afros, most weren't models – but by now some people from* Cat in the Hat *had a profile, like Amanda Cazalet and Felix, the kid who'd done a Madonna video, so I had a few prima donnas backstage, and when I called them they wouldn't come forward. The merchandise wasn't showing properly: there was no flow; there was a lot of jumping and running. It was a complete nightmare and it was all being revealed to the audience. And the Lycra looked liked S&M bondage gear. It wasn't done that way – it was much more Kinky Gerlinky – but this was before anyone had seen this in fashion. It was before Gaultier did all his S&M looks, so there was a load of criticism. There was no drop-off in orders, but from that point on, David and Stevie were being watched.*

Tim: How did the audience respond?
David: Everyone else loved it! It worked beautifully. But everything had turned on its head. It was a different mood. We were inspired by what was happening around us.

Tim: What was happening around you?
David: Drugs.
Stevie: There was lots of heroin.
David: It took a turn for that dark feel. It was darker in its lighting, and darker on the catwalk.

Tim: Were people dying around you?
Stevie: Yeah, people that we had on the catwalk in the *Barbee* show did die.
David: Not at that time, but later on. It was the heroin chic thing, That's basically what we were doing back then.

Tim: Was it a problem for you?
David: I was taking heroin at the time. Stevie wasn't though.
Tim: Did you feel this joyous edifice you'd created was crumbling?
Stevie: I don't know what I was feeling. I do remember Elsa Klensch[50] interviewing us after the *Barbee* show and me thinking, 'Don't say anything, David!'

Tim: Have you talked about it much since that time?
David: What, the drugs? No, not really. We'd all had the drugs experience. Stevie hadn't. She had hers later. I got mine out of the way a bit earlier. I did get into the heroin chic thing at that time.
Stevie: Luckily, you didn't get addicted.
David: I didn't get addicted, thankfully, but then I wouldn't have done because I'm not like that. But a lot of them did go on to become fully-fledged junkies.

Tim: Stevie, were you worried? It's not easy to watch your friends slip away.
Stevie: I remember Lynne saying: 'You've got to do something.'

David: Because I was out of control. But I was just experiencing a thing at the time. It was only for that season.

John Maybury: *Though BodyMap was fashion, it was as responsive as a news report. In a funny way, it was a kind of journalism. The world Stevie and David were showing was the way they were living.*

Stephen Jones: *That whole time was set against the background of this weird new disease coming from America. People knew people in San Francisco or New York who were dropping like flies. We didn't know if tomorrow was going to come or not, so what had been this wonderful, magical phenomenon started to crack apart in the most unpleasant way. That very optimistic life we'd had was cut short, and you could see what a very strange time it was by looking at the fashion, whether it was BodyMap, Rachel Auburn, Richard Torry or Leigh Bowery.*

Tim: But massive, rapid success followed by crash and burn is the kind of story people relish if they're jealous. Did you get the impression that people wanted to take you down a peg?
David: Of course, that was what it felt like. I mean, it was just a taste of that, and it coincided with what we were doing at the time. But the next season was the *Half World* collection; all very tame and much more tailored, as a response to what had happened before.
Stevie: The *Half World*, inspired by Dorian Gray.[51] Still quite dark though!
David: I wasn't into drugs any more; it was just the flavour of that moment.
Stevie: We signed the American licence between *Barbee* and *Half World* with a company called Design Consortium. One guy had been with Calvin Klein and they were like all-round rag-trade people. But it was a difficult deal. They couldn't make BodyMap because of the cost of importing lots of the fabrics from Europe, so in the end we had to make BodyMap for wholesale prices, plus a small percentage. It was really horrible to do that because it was so much more work but for not much more money. They did do well for B-Basic. That was our diffusion line, which we were making with a company in Leicester. There was also an American B-Basic in stretch jeans, with our prints and little turtlenecks and polo necks and two-by-two and one-by-one ribs. They could make that in El Paso, and they had some factories and distribution in the Amish district in upstate New York.

Tim: How long did that deal last?
Stevie: Three years.
David: It started out quite well. It was like we moved into a slightly different gear. We were staying in fabulous hotels and driving about in limousines.
Stevie: We were in upper class on one of the first Virgin flights to New York, which was amazing. Staying at Morgans.[52] The hotel didn't have a licence, so we used to phone up for Champagne and they'd get the doorman to go to the shop to buy it for us.
David: And Steve Rubell, who owned the hotel, took us up to the penthouse and we partied. So we were living the high life after *Barbee*.

Tim: Your new partners weren't flustered by the American media response?
Stevie: No. We had that licence and the one in Japan which we signed with Isetan.[53] So we were in Japan, New York, Italy. We were never at home.
David: Our feet didn't touch the ground. We were literally in and out all the time.
Tim: And there was 18 months of that between *Cat in the Hat* and the next one, *Is a Comet a Star, a Moon, a Sun aura Racoon?*
Stevie: The Design Consortium was a bit of a problem, because they oversold BodyMap. We were selling on our own to the best boutiques when Lynne was our PR, and we got our first American stores ourselves. Then, after *Barbee*, we signed the deal, and the Americans started selling it but they would sell it too close to other shops.

'We paid ourselves £50 a week but were living the lifestyle, getting on planes to New York and Japan and Italy every other weekend. We never stopped.'

'That time was set against the backdrop of this weird new disease coming from America. People in San Francisco or New York were dropping like flies.'

David: At first it was fabulous, and then it kind of went sour.
Tim: When was Taboo?[54]
David: It was during that *Barbee* time, because I remember us going.

Princess Julia: *They had great successes, but the reality was that people were all over the place. MDMA was emerging; heroin affected a lot of people. People used different things as coping mechanisms. Taboo was a particular sort of club that was one of the more extreme spaces. Obviously, everyone was encouraged to get dressed up. Leigh [Bowery] was doing his own collections, evolving. BodyMap was considered a successful design team and it was quite established as a brand, with a whole company by then. They were exploring other collaborations – working with Michael Clark, for instance. David LaChapelle was part of the BodyMap gang. He was a go-go dancer at Taboo. The place was so bonkers that I wondered how they got up to go to work. It's true that Jeffrey played the slipmat.[55] People were dancing to this horrible grey noise. Leigh came running up and said, 'Jeffrey's playing the slipmat. You have to stop him.' So I went up and told him he was playing the slipmat, and he said: 'Oh yes, I'll have a cup of tea please.' He was tripping, and I think he thought he was at home. Then it dawned on him.*

Stevie: Also, we were working with Michael Clark at the time.
Tim: How did that start?
Stevie: He came to us when he saw *Cat in the Hat*. We did the unitards with long sleeves. We did rubber chaps and frilly skirts for him.

Tim: Were you always a dancer?
David: I loved ballet and dance; I used to go to ballet classes. But we knew Michael from the club scene – Taboo and the Bell in King's Cross. He was friends with Jeffrey and other friends of ours. He liked BodyMap; we gave him some bits to wear, and then he asked us to design a collection for him.
Stevie: *Do You Me? I Did*. It was the stretchy mesh rubber bits. And David and Michael became boyfriends.
David: John had gone off to New York to start his art career. He was with artists there, and he never came back. So, I was a bit like, 'Oh, OK, whatever'. And then Michael came along so I started hanging out with him. And I became close friends with Leigh Bowery because he was in Michael's company. I think we actually met him in Kensington Market, because he would work on Rachel Auburn's stall with Trojan. There were three of them, Leigh, Trojan and another guy. I'm very bad with names. They all looked the same, like the three kings.
Tim: I imagine you must have been quite an intimidating clique. Actually, that is very valuable with a fashion brand – having a group of people who embody what it is you do and who stand by you. Especially if they're all doing amazing things like Taboo.
David: People were around us but we never saw anyone beyond our circle. We didn't really integrate. Most of it stemmed from Warren Street and old friends. In Taboo, we were always in our group: Jeffrey, Julia, John… well, actually it was Michael at that point.

Les Child: *When David and Michael got together, there was so much gossip. I was at [stylist and writer] Jerry Stafford's place in Paris and Sue Tilley[56] called to tell us. They were unbelievably in love. And there was a whole group of girls in love with them, at their beck and call. We'd go out to a club, or to the Bell, and everywhere they went, the whole club followed. They'd be snogging at Heaven, and everybody was around, being present. It's like when Kate Moss walks in a room today – the whole place moves. New York was calling – all the clubs trying to get Michael and the London scene over there. But then after* Barbee*, everything became very insular and clique-y. Everybody disregarding everybody. It was a form of bullying.*

Tim: Do you ever wonder if there was a time when success went to your head?
David: When we were out, we would dance and have a fabulous time. But I think we were working so hard, it literally felt like we'd worked an entire life in those few years. It was 24/7. And because we were always on a journey or a flight or coming back, we would go out and have a good time and then go straight back to work.
Stevie: We were too busy to really realize what was happening.
David: We were just trying to make the money to cover the manufacturing and another collection that was pretty imminent. Plus, we were literally every other weekend in Italy, making sure that was going OK.

'They had great success, but people were all over the place. MDMA emerging; heroin affecting people. People used different things as coping mechanisms.'

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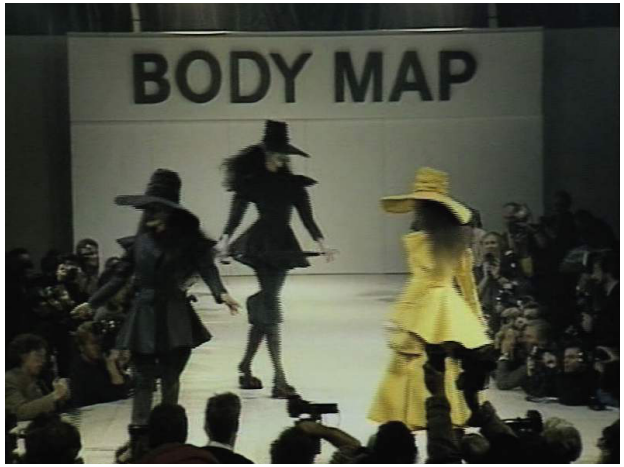

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15. Film still of the *Barbee Takes a Trip* collection, Spring/Summer 1985, with Lena.
16. Film still of the *Tudors and Stewart and Holah* collection, Autumn/Winter, 1986, with Rita, Sue and Davina.

Stevie: We designed the whole collection for Goldie. We learned an incredible amount there because we had to deal with all the agents from all the different countries. We'd pin the designs up on boards and get feedback from all the agents, which was really an incredible education, and that helped us learn how to market our collection.

Tim: Maybe you were prepped for it because you'd been so practical for so long before you reached this point.
Stevie: We'd already worked while we were at college.
David: And we were pretty resourceful. We could pull it together. When they put us in the Goldie box, we were churning that stuff out.
Stevie: We were like design computers.
David: That discipline really filtered into *Barbee*. I mean, it was just beyond. There was so much stuff.
Stevie: We could have done about six collections with all that; it was such an explosion of ideas, and fabrics and options.
Tim: Did you have any sense of being standard bearers for the whole scene in London?
David: I don't think we ever really stood back and looked at what was happening. One day just melted into the next. It was our company. The people who worked for us would go home about 6pm, but we stayed all night and had meetings. We just had to do it.

Tim: Did you have a sense of the long term at this point?
Stevie: We wanted to.
Tim: What would it have been?
Stevie: Just to carry on.
David: I suppose we thought that what we were doing would make that happen, so we worked hard to make it continue. When we went into troubled times, we still worked to try and pull it out.
Tim: You said *Half World* was a reaction to *Barbee* – a kind of consciously safer option. That suggests an evolving commercial awareness.
Stevie: We did try to tone it down a bit for *Half World*. But we had the American licence and we did a denim section in the show for them, and they must have given us some money towards it. We did stretch denim and machine knits too, like *Cat in the Hat*. The same design motif on the hand knit and the machine knit.

Tim: And how did that collection do?
Stevie: It did well. I can't quite remember – I'll have to look at the sales charts. Then it was *Isa Comet*, which was a really big production in the Natural History Museum, with lasers and Boy George in the audience. And we showed B-Basics. Jeffrey was still doing the music. And we had God knows how many cameras: John Maybury, Cerith Wyn Evans, Judy Blame, Sophie Muller, Steve Chivers. Maybe five or six cameras of our own to record the whole thing as a film.
Stevie: *Isa Comet* was followed by *Tudors*, but then came the money problems.
David: It wasn't really Tudor. It was more Georgian.
Stevie: We were using viscose Lycra then, and sportswear-y fabric. You can see the development from when we started. It was more towards taking sportswear fabrics like nylons and rubberized cottons and putting them into design shapes.

Tim: Did the money problems make the work a chore?
David: Yes, because we had to work to make it succeed.
Tim: While you were wondering where it all went…
Stevie: We weren't ever rich. The Americans in their first year sold 1.5 million, according to this telex paper in the archive. So we got our royalty on that. I guess we were sort of in the middle.

Tim: Were you ever in a position to buy yourself a flat?
David: No, no.
Stevie: We were going to buy something together.
David: It was only £30,000, but in those days, that was a lot of money.
Stevie: We just put everything into the business.
David: It's a shame. But no, I had a council flat and I've still got it.
Tim: What, the same flat?
David: It's a different one. We got housed after Warren Street and then we got council flats. Jeffrey still lives in the original one we got.
Tim: With all his records?
David: They got a three-bed flat. They were downstairs. Julia and Stephen Jones lived in that one, then Stephen moved out and Leigh moved in. Then Julia moved out and Leigh died, and Jeffrey still lives there with his records.
Tim: And you and Michael – what happened? Did that last very long?
David: Two and a half years. He was doing his world tour and I went with him.
Stevie: And I was left here dealing with the problems of the sinking ship!
David: Because by then BodyMap was on the downturn.
Stevie: So David was off gallivanting around the world…
David: You've got to live your life, haven't you?

Richard Buckley: *I really don't know any of this for sure, it is all conjecture, but I believe BodyMap became a disposable product of the fashion system: they were made into stars and then discarded. It was a strange 'rise and fall' period in London. I remember one designer who showed so much promise with his menswear. Eventually, the Japanese were investing in his business, or he was designing there, I'm not sure, and I saw him out at Madame Jojo's*[57] *in the fall of 1986. He was wearing clothes by Yohji Yamamoto. He had finally made a little money and was buying 'designer' clothes instead of wearing his own clothes. The last time I saw him, he was designing accessories for a menswear company, and not under his own name. There were lots of stories like that during the end of the 1980s. Stevie and David were another story altogether. One minute, they were young people expressing themselves through fashion, the next they were the darlings of the fashion world and London club society. As the business grew, so did the constraints of expansion and production. I think it was all a little much for them. There were no safety nets, then. Also, what got back to me is that there were a lot of heavy drugs and David wasn't running the business at 100 percent. Believe me, I cared about the two of them a great deal. I really wanted them to succeed.*

The End

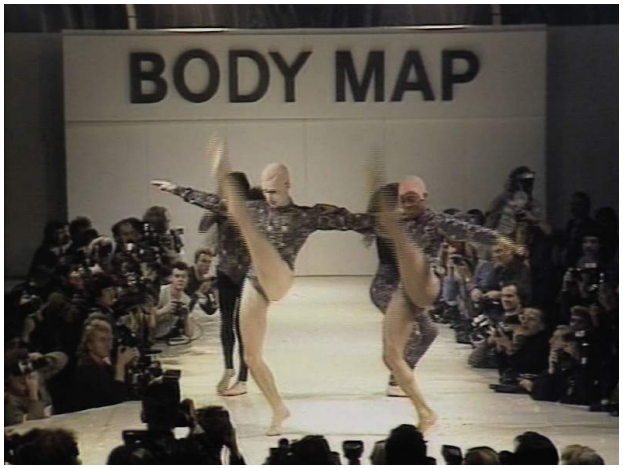
Tim: Was there ever a time for the two of you when you felt like you had drifted so far apart that you'd lost touch…
David: Well, I was in Australia…
Stevie: We were always friends. We were always going to work together.
David: Yeah, we've stuck together. We're still friends. Stevie gets me involved in projects sometimes, and so, yeah, it works like that. But our work is different now.
Tim: If the BodyMap book and the exhibition happen, it's an opportunity to come back together and put a seal on the way you want history to see you.
David: Well, I guess that's the reason to do the book.

Tim: I'm surprised it hasn't happened already.
David: We've had a few things in the pipeline – like a Comme des Garçons thing or a Stüssy thing – but then they came to nothing.
Stevie: At one point, H&M were interested in doing a collaboration.

Tim: Do you think you have a reputation?
David: No, not really. Not like it was. I might have had a bit of an attitude back in the day.
Tim: Even if you did, the statute of limitations would have run out on that long ago. But bright young things do piss people off…
David: I was just busy, getting on with doing stuff. Maybe I did have an air of being 'busy'. Maybe I just didn't have enough time for other people. I'm not like that now. I was too busy then.
Tim: How could it have been different, do you reckon?
Stevie: You mean the moral of the story? When Joseph turned one of his shops in South Molton Street into BodyMap, I think we should have been more aware of how brilliant that was and tried to work with him more. It was only going to be a one-season thing for *Cat in the Hat*, but we could have made it long-term.
David: It had amazing press. The shop was fabulous. We should have learned, but we were 'busy'!
Stevie: Then Lynne Franks wanted to open a Biba-esque shop.[58] We had the head-to-toe dressing and the lifestyle thing, the healthy eating.
Tim: When was that?
Stevie: This was when we had money problems, and she was, like, 'Why don't we do this? Get a shop in Covent Garden and do fashion and lifestyle, be very ahead of our time.' But we were too scared at that point and we had no money.
David: I suppose it's that commitment thing. We didn't commit to the right things at the right time, and we didn't have a backer. Well, we did, but it didn't work.
Stevie: Our worst thing was the American licence. They owed us money. Not a million, but a lot. A big Swedish-Icelandic distributor went under and they owed us £35,000 or something. Then the

'We didn't try and fit into the fashion mould: the networking, building the brand, milking it to the max. We're just not that type of people.'

'BodyMap became a disposable product of the fashion system – made into stars then discarded. It was a strange 'rise and fall' period in London.'



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17. Film still of the *Isa Comet…* collection, Spring/Summer, 1986, with Michael Clark and Les Child.
18. Film still of the *Barbee Takes a Trip* collection, Spring/Summer 1985, with Hilde Smith.

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19. Film still of the *BodyMap-ism* collection, Spring/Summer, 1988, at the Piccadilly Theatre, London.
20. Film still of the *Life Is* collection, Spring/Summer 1990, with Roy Brown and Eugenie Vincent.

cotton fabric from the Swedish factory we'd worked with from the beginning went wrong. In the shops, it laddered on the seams. It had needle penetration problems, so we had to recall all of that. In a small period of time, everything went wrong.

Tim: And where was all of this in your show schedule?
David: There was a period when we didn't have a show.
Stevie: Wasn't it in between *Tudors* and *BodyMap-ism*? It was that period 1987-1988. We had a blip, then we started again. Strawberry Studio – George Hammer and Bryan Paradise – took us under their wing, as backers, but that didn't last. We bought the company back from them and we started again. We had a few intermediary seasons to a company that did the manufacturing, the distribution, the sales and the PR out of one company. It was like individual people backing you, if you know what I mean. Peder Bertelsen[60] was interested at one point.
David: It was all a bit tentative. It's a shame, really. Imagine if it had still been going – we'd be rich by now! Rich! Rich! The other thing about us is that we didn't connect with the fashion thing. We didn't try and fit into the fashion mould; we were too busy doing our things. We didn't go into that fashion marketplace and do the necessary myth building. I think that's another reason. The two of us together don't do that: the networking, building the brand, going into all the forums, milking it to the max, pushing ourselves forward. We're just not that type of people, unfortunately. Otherwise, we probably would have made more of a thing of it. We would have made sure we were locked and set in place. But we were under a lot of pressure. We'd been through a lot.
Stevie: Yeah, and then I nearly lost my mum's house.
David: Stevie's mum had died. It was all the end of a story really. Picking up the pieces seemed too much.
Tim: Do you ever feel that you were ahead of your time?
Stevie: Oh, yeah. Too ahead of our time.
David: Our biggest problem.
Stevie: The *Barbee* collection – there were so many ideas. We could have optimized it and slowed it down.
David: We could have done with a good manager who worked with us and not against us. If Lynne could have been our manager then it might have worked, but that wasn't her thing. We worked well with Lynne. If she had managed us that would have been the key, because then she could have directed it in the specific way that it needed to go. You know, the lifestyle and all the ideas we had for everything. She could have pinpointed it in a more direct way. Instead of giving it all, she could have helped us hold back a bit. Spread it out a bit.

Or Is It….?

David: I have to leave at 5pm, because I'm teaching.
Tim: What are you teaching?
David: Printmaking. All different techniques: lino, etching, wood cuts, block-printing – everything. I try and incorporate everything. I teach a lot of beginners. We make nice little prints. Usually, it's only five-week blocks, so they need to find out and get inspired…
Tim: Is it satisfying?
David: I've been doing it for quite a few years now, and, yeah, I do enjoy it. I teach textiles, too. Silkscreen printing. It's quite varied. I get to see lots of different people. I teach at City Lit and Morley College. I also teach BA students at a college in Canterbury.

Tim: Did you ever imagine that is what you would end up doing?
David: I used to teach fashion a lot.
Stevie: We both taught. We've taught Phoebe Philo, Hussein Chalayan, Giles Deacon. They were all in a second-year project that we did at Saint Martins.
David: I just worked with Giles again recently. I did some Tudor-inspired prints with him. It was nice to work with him, because we'd taught him years ago. It was really nice to be brought in for that. Although I'm not doing fashion now, it is quite nice to just dip in. Stevie is still involved with clothes-making and she gets me in sometimes. I didn't think I would be a tutor, but I like it. You know, it's not like every single day, so I have some space to do my own thing. I did a little scarf project with this company and then it all went horribly wrong.
Tim: But the scarves are so beautiful.
David: They weren't fashion. We did the scarves and then they wanted to make clothes. They wanted to make a parka, a dressing gown, and this and that in silk and stuff. It could have been really lovely and beautiful, but they didn't fully understand how to make and develop things. They became a bit tiresome and I still hadn't been paid, so I was, like, 'OK, I just can't do this anymore. It's too much, too much.' It would have been lovely if it had been easier.
Stevie: We did do a lovely parka; I helped David on the clothes side.

Giles Deacon: *When I started at Saint Martins in 1989, BodyMap meant everything to me. They were the thing you dreamed of being in contact with. So when I was lucky enough to have David and Stevie as external tutors in 1990, it was like having proper legends coming in. Every student was pulling out their best looks to come into college. I remember the project so clearly. I'd done these sketches of everything that was a play on words – pencil skirt, mini-dress – and they really got into it. David made it easy, and kind of pop, which was very good for me because I was overworking things. He made me think about movement: interacting with bodies, styling it on dancers, imagining the clothes on the street, and which club you would like to see them in, or would it be a gallery or a market? It was wonderful being able to bring David in to design some prints for my Spring 2016 show. They were incredible – modern Tudor, transvestite pagan! He had the same wide-eyed openness, the same incredibly perceptive take on style and culture. I think BodyMap has stood the test of time: its look, its technique, its iconography was so ahead of its time. In fact, its spirit is of no time. It still resonates. I don't think of it as a failure. The relationship between fashion and commerce hadn't worked itself out then. Given another 10 years, everything would have been different. Everybody who knew David and Stevie has this kind of obsession with them. They created a phenomenal body of work. You can see that in all the designers now who are collecting their work, and who are inspired by them. It's not nostalgia.*

Tim: Can you see your influence?
Stevie: Yes! During the time of BodyMap, Benetton copied us, Laura Ashley, Miss Selfridge copied us.
David: Everyone copied us and they still are copying us.
Stevie: A few years ago, the last D&G show was inspired by us, Stephen Sprouse and someone else in the 1980s. It was so BodyMap.
David: As an influence, we have definitely held our own. BodyMap is very influential.
Stevie: And just our pioneering use of all the Lycra fabrics. I mean, we did invent those.
David: We changed the way that people dressed, which is another thing. And the way we presented stuff. We were so ready to give all of our time to the work. We gave those extra hours to it to carry that dream forward, but, in the end, it didn't happen. Which I suppose for both of us has been quite a big disappointment.
Tim: Did you feel defeated by it?
David: Yeah. Especially because Stevie lost her inheritance.
Stevie: My half of the money went to pay off the BodyMap debt.
David: So, it was a big thing. All that time. I know we've left our mark and that's why it would be good to do the book. Then it's done. It's in there.
Tim: It doesn't buy you a boat in the Bahamas though!
David: No. I still earn about 80 quid a week!
Stevie: Exactly.
Tim: Well, we are going to change that, goddammit!

The Envoi: From a Couple of Fashion Sages Who Lived It Alongside Stevie and David

Jerry Stafford: *It was all very exciting and new at the time, and it caught the fashion world's attention, which, aside from Vivienne [Westwood], had really been starved of an 'intelligent', culturally resonant fashion movement and performance-driven presentations since Ossie Clark's happenings over a decade before. And the excitement really was those shows! They were provocative,*

'BodyMap has stood the test of time. You can see that in all the designers now who collect their work, and who are inspired by them. It's not nostalgia.'

'Dreams, like people, can die. Memories fade. But looking back now we have to acknowledge the unique and uncompromising vision BodyMap always had.'

camp, eclectic, theatrical mise-en-scenes, combining performance, dance, and true punk chaos. They deconstructed the conventional academic show format and replaced it with a spontaneous, diverse, gender-provocative display of narcissism and narcotics. It was perfectly of its time for the members and followers of the BodyMap cult, but probably way ahead of its time for most other people. And therein lies one of the challenges they always faced: BodyMap was, possibly, just too visionary. In retrospect, I think they just had too much to say, too much to express, and maybe the messages got lost. Lives got entangled and life took over. AIDS reared its ugly head. Drugs. Shit happened in the late-1980s that wasn't conducive to the innocent, arrogant hedonism of the disco family lifestyle that fuelled their spirit. Dreams, like people, can die. Memories can fade. But still – looking back now from our gender-fluid, PC, diverse, all-inclusive, self-congratulatory plateau – we have to acknowledge and celebrate the unique and uncompromising vision they always had.

Stephen Jones: *I knew David and Stevie because we went to the same clubs, and also from Warren Street. In that way that people from London thought Duran Duran were quite exotic because they were from Birmingham, we thought David and Stevie were exotic because most of us went to Saint Martins and they'd gone to Middlesex Polytechnic. And then they were BodyMap! They were so famous! What they did was so different to what everybody else did. When we were staggering round in taffeta, they did it in cotton jersey with a zip up the back. Overlocked jersey stretched out to make skirts with frill, upon frill, upon frill, so they just kept moving. It was fantastic! And it was for everybody – wearable, not expensive. It was much more like Biba than some kind of fancy designer label. And it was absolutely magical. That's the word I would use. Michael Clark doing the rain dance at the end of every show; Stevie's mother and David's little niece Nico would come out on stage; the audience jumping up to join in; and Hilde's prints of signs and tarots and magical symbols.*

Taboo, Leigh Bowery, these things have somehow lasted. I don't know why certain things last and certain things don't. Fashion has a very short memory. And it changes. Suddenly there was Margiela and Helmut Lang and a whole new ethos that was not about the party and having a fantastic time and the magic of performance. So, in a way, BodyMap was no longer relevant. Which sounds cruel, because they were so relevant to a whole mentality, and so successful at encapsulating that mentality and that moment, that, when it passed, they got passed over, too. That's partly why I think people perceive BodyMap now as being so integral to the 1980s. And don't forget that what went parallel with them was a total change in journalism, from the old-guard magazines like Vogue *and* Harper's, *to* i-D, The Face, Blitz. *Those magazines were their vehicles, and they helped hundreds of thousands of 16- and 17- and 18-year-olds to grow up with a completely different sense of fashion. When you look back, BodyMap was really representative of all that. They had this big office and people used to go and hang out there. In a way, yes, of course it was a fashion label, but it became a figure of speech as much as a T-shirt. It was shorthand for something, like Warhol's Factory or Halston and the Halstonettes. BodyMap was a movement.*

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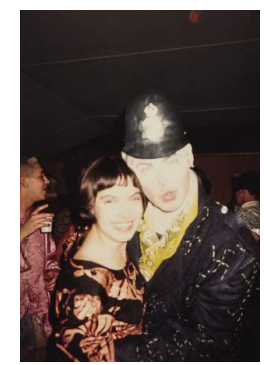

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21. Stevie Stewart and David Holah.
22. BodyMap Club access-all-areas card, c.1989.
23. Stevie Stewart, David Holah and Leigh Bowery, Edinburgh, 1985.
24. Leigh Bowery, Holly W. and friends at Taboo club, approx 1985.
25. Stevie Stewart and Leigh Bowery, at the post-show party for the *Isa Comet…* Spring/Summer 1986 collection, London.

1. Adrien Mann was a costume jewellery company based in London. Its designs were popular from the 1960s until the late 1980s.

2. Stephen Rothholz is an accessories designer, known for his jewellery created for labels such as Paul Smith and Hardy Amies. He designed sunglasses for a number of designers; a pair he made for Jasper Conran is in the V&A's collection.

3. Melissa Caplan studied fashion design and would go on to design clothes for Spandau Ballet and Toyah. She is now an artist and photographer.

4. Kim Bowen is now a costume designer. She is credited with founding the Warren Street squat, a Georgian terraced house in Fitzrovia, central London, when a student at Saint Martins School of Art; it became the hub for art-school fashion and music scene at that time.

5. The Scala was a rep cinema that opened on Tottenham Street in 1979 and moved to a location near King's Cross Station two years later. It quickly earned an outré reputation. By the time it closed in 1993, its founder Stephen Woolley had already become a film producer – and been nominated for an Academy Award for Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*.

6. Film star, cross-dressing legend, and muse to John Waters, Divine – or Harris Glen Milstead – died of respiratory failure aged 42 in 1988.

7. Lesley Chilkes is now a well-known makeup artist.

8. Lee Sheldrick was at Saint Martins. He became a designer and moved to Japan.

9. Jeffrey Hinton and Princess Julia first made their names as DJs. Hinton has since worked on soundtracks for designers such as Rifat Ozbek, Alexander McQueen and Jonathan Saunders, as well as dancer Michael Clark and for exhibitions. As well as a DJ, Princess Julia writes for *i-D* and for *Man About Town*.

10. Bobby Hillson founded the Saint Martins MA fashion course in the late 1970s.

11. Quentin Crisp was born Denis Charles Pratt in 1908. Flamboyantly and unashamedly gay, he struggled to find jobs – working variously as a prostitute, engineer's tracer and life model – until the publication of his memoir, *The Naked Civil Servant* in 1968, turned into a film in 1975 starring John Hurt. He became a professional raconteur and in 1981 moved to New York, where he lived simply and ate most days in the same restaurant on the corner of East 4th Street and 2nd Avenue. He died aged 90 in 1999.

12. Gerlinde and Michael Costiff met in 1969. By the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, they were fixtures on the clubbing scene, and regulars at the clubs Blitz and Taboo. They began their own night, Kinky Gerlinky, in the late 1980s. Held monthly and moving around venues until it settled at the Empire Ballroom in Leicester Square, Kinky Gerlinky became home to a wild crowd of drag artists, fashion lovers and club kids that included Boy George, Leigh Bowery, Rachel Auburn (who also DJed), Nina Hagen, and Pam Hogg (who called it 'the only decent club in London' in 1991). Gerlinde died suddenly in 1994. Their life together is celebrated in *Michael & Gerlinde's World: Pages from a Diary*, which was published by Kim Jones' imprint, Slow Loris in 2013.

13. After Susanne Bartsch left London and arrived in New York in 1981, she opened a shop on Thompson Street in Soho that specialized in all the rising British fashion designers. She also set about becoming the queen of the night and is today a legendary club promoter, curator of young cultural talent, fundraiser for AIDS research, and a wearer of fabulous costumes. In a *New York Times* article from 2002, she discusses her then eight-year-old son's reaction to her appearance one night: 'He saw me and said, "Mom, you look like a freak". He's probably going to be an accountant.'

14. Anna Piaggi (1931-2012) was a fashion journalist, translator, muse and style icon was renowned for her eclectic ensembles, distinctive make-up and a fine collection of hats (often made by Stephen Jones).

15. Louise Doktor is, in the *New York Times*' words, 'an administrative assistant at a New York holding company'. She is also a collector of avant-garde fashion and was a favourite of street photographer Bill Cunningham until his death (he left her $50,000 in his will). Terry is her husband.

16. In 1981, Stephen Linard's *Reluctant Emigrés* graduation collection became the second legendary show he had produced in two years. The first was *Neon Gothic*, a show that slotted into the burgeoning New Romantic zeitgeist. After founding his own label and making clothes for David Bowie and the Pet Shop Boys, he moved to Japan. He now works in London as a textile consultant.

17. Stephen Jones is a milliner who has collaborated with Vivienne Westwood, Claude Montana, Dior and Thom Browne, among others.

18. Mikel Rosen was David Holah and Stevie Stewart's tutor at Middlesex Polytechnic; he later helped them produce their shows.

19. To Lynne Franks' eternal chagrin, her many achievements such as setting up, aged just 21, a pioneering and hugely successful PR firm that would go on to represent clients including Vivienne Westwood and Jasper Conran, or her decades of campaigning for women's rights both in the UK and across the world, or the four books she has written, or her longstanding work for NGOs, are always overshadowed by the fact that she was the inspiration for Edina Monsoon in the sitcom *Absolutely Fabulous*.

20. The event, held in a tent at the Commonwealth Institute, was actually a precursor to the now official London Fashion Week.

21. Hilde Smith is a textile designer whose prints for BodyMap were sometimes based on early computer graphics. She called herself a 'surface-pattern designer'.

22. Robert Forrest was chief buyer for Brown's until 1984.

23. Norma Kamali presented her first Sweats collection in 1980.

24. Joan Burstein and her husband Sidney were the founders of Browns, whose success was partly based on their long-time support of young, up-and-coming designers.

25. Joseph Ettedgui (1936-2010) was a fashion entrepreneur and the founder of the label Joseph.

26. John Maybury is a filmmaker and artist.

27. Enrico Job (1934-2008) was an artist, theatrical set designer and production and costume designer for films, including Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey's *Flesh for Frankenstein* and *Blood for Dracula*. BodyMap takes its name from his 1974 photographic work, *Il mappocorpo*.

28. In 2004, Stevie Stewart told Tim Blanks: 'We did the cooking and the healthy eating thing. I went on a few radio programmes and we had recipes published in *Elle*. We used to send the press home-made organic Christmas puddings: sugar-free, wheat-free, dairy-free. We thought, 'Oh God, everyone thinks we're drug-taking fiends of the night', when we were actually really healthy eaters. We travelled a lot to New York, and we made friends with a lot of people and a lot of them were macrobiotic. And then we'd go to Japan, and then we'd go to Italy and we'd have this northern Italian country cooking. So we had all of these influences around us, and we started putting them together, cooking for our parties. I remember one of Michael's dance pieces where David was chopping carrots on stage to make miso soup.'

29. Levita Court was a block of social housing built by London County Council in the late 1920s and inspired by the Karl Marx-Hof in Vienna. Its five storeys made it the first 'high-rise' public housing in the UK.

30. *New London in New York* was a show organized by Susanne Bartsch in the Roxy nightclub on 18th Street, Manhattan, in April 1983. The invitations were by Leigh Bowery and his lover Trojan and the set by Michael Costiff. It showcased 24 up-and-coming British designers

31. Richard Buckley is an American writer and journalist, and Tom Ford's husband.

32. The Individual Clothes Show was a joint venture between Lynne Franks and textile and print agent Wendy Booth. It was held biannually, first at a hotel on Curzon Street, then at the Athenaeum Hotel, then as part of the London Fashion Exhibition at Olympia. Designers shown included Betty Jackson, Ally Capellino and John Richmond.

33. John Duka was a style reporter for the *New York Times* between 1979 and 1985, writing a weekly column, 'Notes on Fashion'. His editor at the paper said of him: 'He understood people and situations instantly. This made him, frankly, a dangerous reporter.' Diagnosed with AIDS in 1988, he died in 1989, aged 33.

34. The antihero of Jean Genet's 1947 novel *Querelle de Brest*, Georges Querelle is a Belgian sailor serving on the ship *Le Vengeur*; he is also a murderer, smuggler, thief, and sexual sadist.

35. Before cartoon character Olive Oyl fell head over heels for Popeye, she was the jealous girlfriend of her brother Castor's lazy friend, Ham Gravy. But Popeye's strength and unerring ability to save her from Bluto meant there could only be one winner in the battle for her heart.

36. Adriano Goldschmied is widely credited with introducing the concept of 'premium denim' and in the process changing the denim market forever. In the early 1980s, his Genius Group had 15 brands, including Goldie, Replay, Diesel, Ten Big Boys and Bobo Kominsky. He later moved to Los Angeles and changed the name to Genious Group.

37. David Mantej and Evelina Barilli designed together as Mantej-Barilli. Their first show, in Milan, was featured in the *New York Times* in October 1985 ('their designs have an Edwardian feeling'); Dolce & Gabbana also showed for the first time at the show (they made 'clothes with a Japanese flavour').

38. Writer and explorer Freya Stark was born in 1893 in Paris, but spent much of her life in Asolo, a small hill town northwest of Venice. After studying Arabic and Persian, she spent much of the 1930s exploring the Middle East. She went to Turkey in the 1950s and on an expedition to Afghanistan in the late 1960s. She died in Asolo in 1993, aged 100.

39. As well as their own brand, David Mantej and Evelina Barilli also designed Bobo Kaminsky for Genius Group. The highly conceptual label's clothing – little of which remains in circulation – was described by Tim Blanks himself as '[o]versized and weirdly cropped, huge-buttoned, hillbilly-weird … the most perfect fashion perversity'.

40. In 1984, Lynne Franks wanted to create a space where British designers could stage their shows and decided upon a tent upon the lawn of the Commonwealth Institute in Kensington (now the Design Museum). She asked one of her clients, Hong Kong-based clothing-manufacturing magnate Mohan Murjani, to sponsor it, and the Murjani Fashion Focus tent was opened in March 1984. It lasted for three seasons until the lawn began sinking.

41. Barry and Nick Kamen were key members of Ray Petri's Buffalo collective and both successful models. Barry went on to become a respected stylist, while Nick Kamen found overnight success in 1985 in an iconic advertisement for Levi's 501s, which he parlayed into a brief singing career. Barry died aged 52 in 2015.

42. In 1987, Sarah Doukas founded Storm, a model agency; she discovered a 14-year-old Kate Moss. Laraine Ashton sold her model agency to IMG in 1987.

43. Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat* was first published in 1957 as an alternative to supposedly ineffectual reading primers.

44. Iain R. Webb is a fashion writer, journalist, and professor at Central Saint Martins.

45. Michael Clark is a British dancer and choreographer renowned for his use of classical techniques in contemporary settings.

46. Les Child is a choreographer who brings the 'artistry of dance to the biggest runways and best editorials'.

47. The Via Vai label was part of the Genius Group.

48. Adjusted for inflation, that is the equivalent of £152 a week.

49. Earlier on the same day as the BodyMap show, a bomb planted by the Irish Republican Army detonated in the Grand Hotel, Brighton, where British prime minister Margaret Thatcher was staying with members of the British government. The explosion collapsed a section of the building killing 5 people and injuring 31 others. Mrs. Thatcher survived.

50. Elsa Klensch presented *Style with Elsa Klensch* on CNN for 21 years until she resigned in 2001. The *New York Observer* described the show as the 'fashion world's must-see equivalent of Monday Night Football', and said Klensch gave 'viewers a close-up of the temperamental world inhabited by eccentric designers, hard-to-please editors and breadstick-thin models'.

51. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is Oscar Wilde's only novel. An expurgated version was printed in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890 and the full version published a year later. Both proved controversial due to their supposedly homoerotic handling of themes of narcissism and doubling.

52. Morgans Hotel at 237 Madison Avenue was considered the first 'boutique' hotel when it was opened by Ian Schrager and Steve Rubell in 1984 after a renovation designed by Andrée Putman. It closed in 2017.

53. During the 1980s, the booming Japanese economy and the strong yen encouraged Japanese department-store group Isetan to expand and enter into international agreements, such as the 1989 deal to license the Barneys name for Japan.

54. Taboo was a club night created by Leigh Bowery and Trojan that opened in January 1985 and was shut down definitively by the police in 1986. In *Interview* in 2008, Boy George, a Taboo regular, described the crowd as 'happy to end up in a pile of vomit and booze at the end of the night. It was anti-fashion, in a sense.'

55. Invented by hip-hop pioneer Grandmaster Flash, a slipmat is a piece of textile or plastic that sits on a turntable under the record. Unlike rubber mats that hold records in place and so in sync with the turntable, it is deliberately designed to allow records to slip, making it easier for DJs to manipulate them.

56. Sue Tilly is best known as a life model who sat numerous times for Lucian Freud.

57. Madame Jojo's opened in the 1960s and became a well-known cabaret and burlesque venue, as well as a club and concert venue, until it lost its licence in 2014. A new Madame Jojo's was scheduled to open in 2018; as of November, it hasn't.

58. Biba, a label and a 'lifestyle' shop created by designer Barbara Hulanicki, was open 1964-1975.

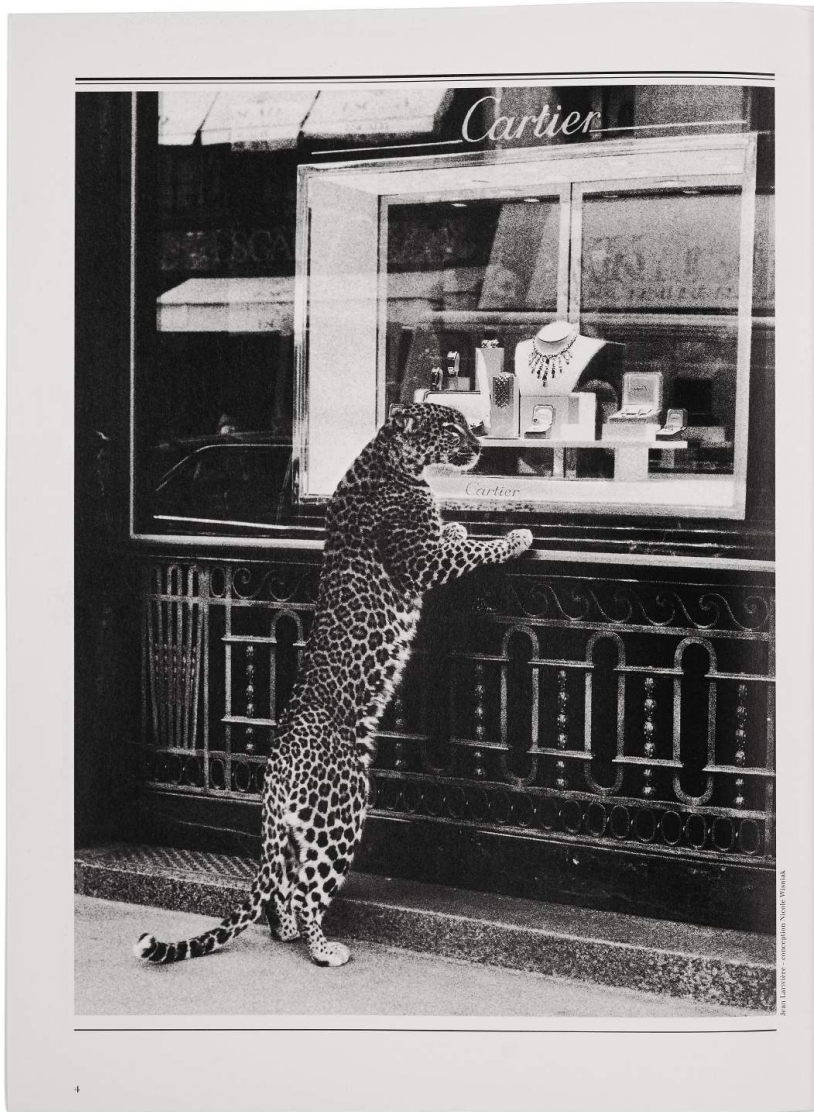
59. Hyper Hyper was an emporium for young designers directly across the road from Kensington Market.

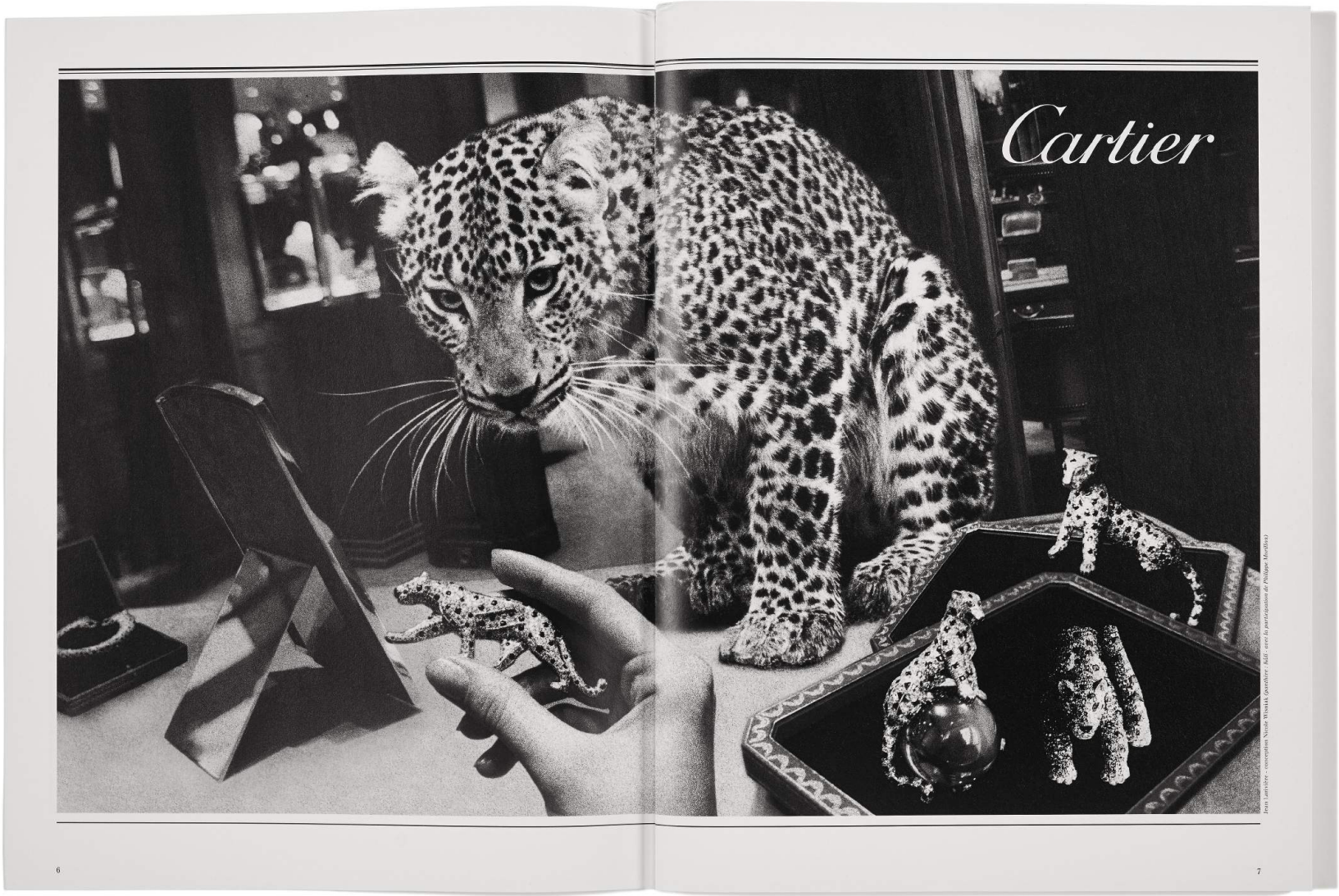
60. The *Evening Standard* once called Ole Peder Bertelsen London's 'most powerful fashion entrepreneur'. A former oil trader turned fashion investor, he brought Ralph Lauren to the UK in 1985, launched stores by Katharine Hamnett and Valentino, and was an early (and brief) backer of John Galliano. He told the *New York Times* in 1987: 'I spend more time thinking than going into shops. Clothes, oil and potatoes are commodities.' He died in August 2018 aged 87.

‘Readers loved the ads as much as the editorial.

Back in the 1970s, Nicole Wisniak bankrolled her magazine *Egoïste* with pages of native advertising *avant l’heure* – advertorials taken to the level of art.

Interview by Thomas Lenthal





Previous page and this page: Photographs by Jean Larivière, issue 14, 2000

Conception Nicole Wisniak - Illustration Philippe Morillon (*agence photographique Alain Ernoult*) - *avec la participation de Thierry Boutet.*

Conception Nicole Wisniak - Illustration Philippe Morillon (*agence photographique Alain Ernoult*) - *avec la participation de Thierry Boutet.*

Illustration by Philippe Morillon, issue 15, 2006

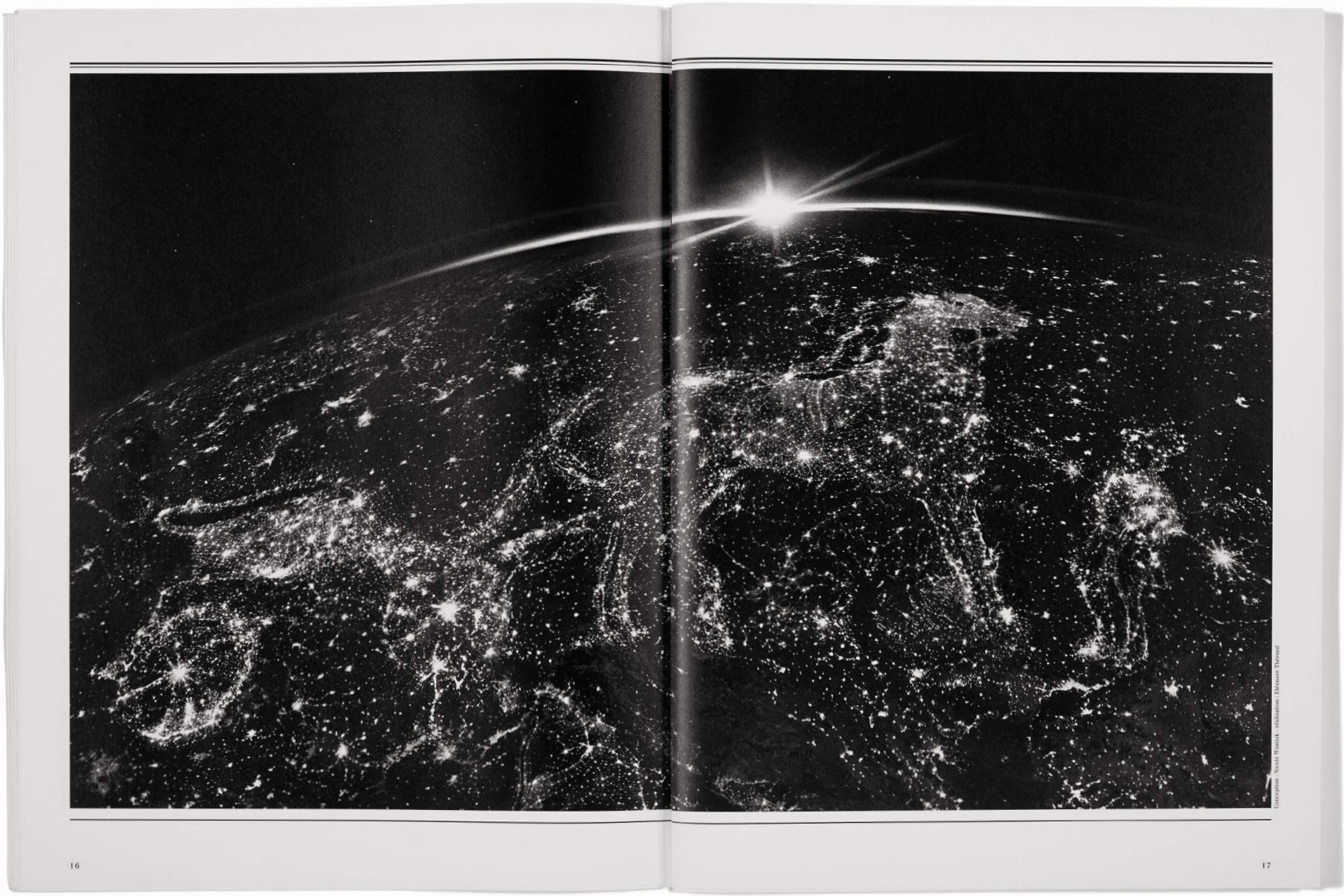


Image by Éléonore Thérond, issue 18, 2018

Ellen von Unwerth, conception Nicolas Wietzak, coiffure: Martina de Marchus, coiffure: Ali Barzic, maquillage: Dior Cosmetics, style accessoires: Dior

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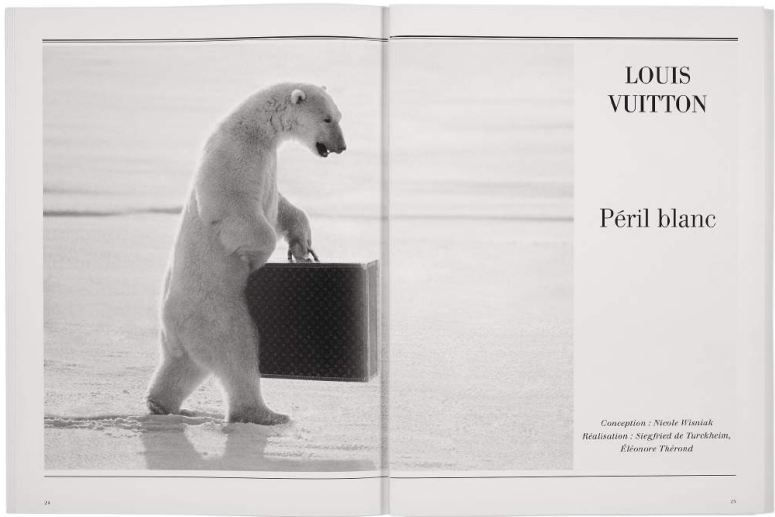
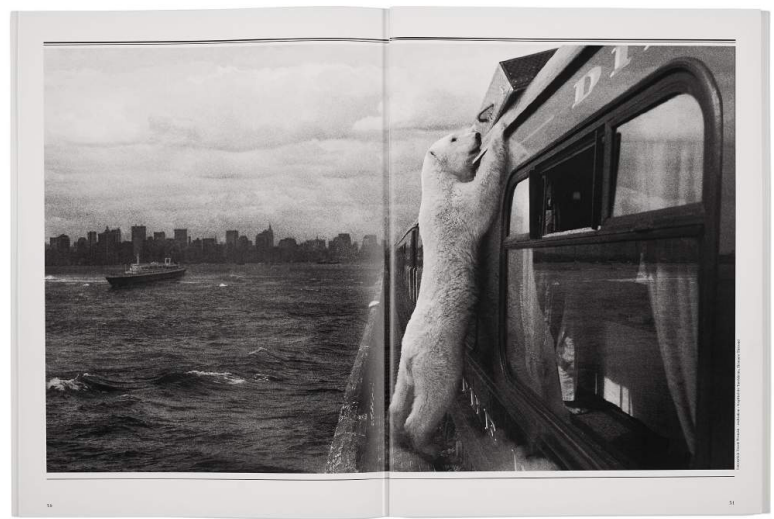
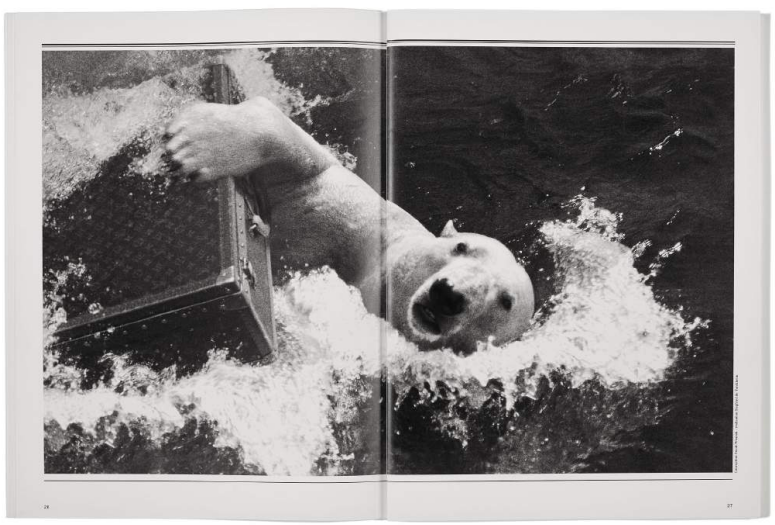
Photograph by Ellen von Unwerth, issue 16, 2011

Paolo Roversi - conception Nicole Wisniak / décor Jean-Hugues de Chaulieu - réalisé Martine de Moulins - coiffure Laurent Philippon - maquillage Marie Dubart (réservoir Dior)

Photograph by Paolo Roversi, issue 18, 2018







Images by Siegfried de Turckheim and Éléonore Thérond, issue 16, 2011

Image by Siegfried de Turckheim and Éléonore Thérond, issue 16, 2011

Hubert Guerdjou Conception Nicole Wisniak

Photograph by Hubert Guerdjou, issue 10, 1987

Hiding in plain sight in each issue of Nicole Wisniak's *Egoïste* magazine, in among the striking black-and-white imagery on its large unbound pages, is an innovation that is even more modern today than it was 40 years ago. When Wisniak was thinking of ways to finance her magazine, she decided that, rather than filling it with fashion and luxury brands' latest advertising campaigns, she would instead create the advertising for them, using photographers she chose to shoot 'advertising' imagery that would appear only in the magazine. It was native advertising *avant l'heure*, advertorials taken to the level of art. Her idea of specially produced, single-use advertising proved attractive to both brands and photographers. Houses like Hermès, Chanel and Cartier signed up for 'campaigns' shot by photographers including Helmut Newton, Guy Bourdin and Paolo Roversi, who could bring their visions to advertising freed of its usual commercial strictures. For *System*, Wisniak selected some of her favourite advertorial images from down the years, and sat down to discuss the birth of *Egoïste*, panther and camel wrangling, and trying to persuade Mick Jagger to leave the house.

I'd like to start off by talking about the world of Parisian advertising and press at the time you launched the magazine, in 1977.

Nicole Wisniak: At the time, I really didn't think about it in these terms. I had no idea what the context was like and, to be honest, I didn't really care. I had no business plan, of course, and no professional ambitions of any kind. If I had, I wouldn't have done it: to launch a magazine almost by myself, one that only comes out when it's ready, with barely more than 8,000 francs[1] in my account – anyone would have discouraged me. But I am quite bold and unrealistic, so I just went for it without studying the market. I had just finished working on the Picasso inheritance[2] and was looking for the opportunity to express my photographic and literary tastes. I had no idea what type of space I was going to occupy in the French media world.

So you didn't say, 'I think the French press is mediocre and I want to do something better'?

I was not that arrogant, and I certainly never thought that everything else was rubbish! I learned my job from my readers. The first issues of *Egoïste* were almost unreadable, but I nonetheless thought that there was a space for me to do something better.

You could have just felt as if nothing was really to your taste and so you wanted to make the magazine that you'd want to read.

No, never! I was interested in everything back then. Well, almost everything. I loved Helmut Newton and Guy Bourdin's pictures, which were featured in Francine Crescent's *Vogue*[3] at the time. I would have never considered doing something that would compete with them. I arrived in this media landscape with great humility; I had no conscious wish to revolutionize things. But I maybe had a certain individuality and freshness, thanks to my character, that pushed me to do it and talk about the things that interested me.

You weren't inspired by anything or anyone in particular at the time? You started off completely innocently?

Yes, I started with a blind confidence. Helmut Newton used to call me the 'Tycoon', which was probably ironic. I printed 4,000 copies of the first issue and 3,000 came back. I stored them in my parents' basement and my mother paid the printer.

You mentioned working on the Picasso inheritance?

Yes, I had studied history and was in the team put together by Maurice Rheims.[4] I organized more than 12,000 of Picasso's drawings. Maurice had to appraise the whole collection and I was in charge of the early drawings, from when Picasso was 14-15, up to about 1932-33. So I held in my hands his studies for *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*.[5] We organized them by periods, so Maurice could price them. We had to make sure they'd all been photographed by looking for each one in the Zervos [catalogue].[6] I stayed there almost three years, and the most interesting thing I did was page layouts with some of Picasso's drawings.

And so one day you woke up and thought, 'I'm going to publish a magazine'?

I had always loved photography and literature and I've always gotten on well with artists. I think it is because my brother is a musician. Every great relationship I've had with artists came from my deep admiration of my brother when I was little. I was 10 and he was 13 and he composed music by banging on glass bottles filled with water. He was so great. All my life, the relationship I've had with artists has just been a way to relive what I had with my brother. I was also very keen on offering the people I most admired a space where they could be totally free to express themselves. Because I believe that the greatest things always come from pleasure. And I knew that if I were able to combine my obsessions with theirs, we would make something different. I wanted to give them the space to showcase the images they couldn't show in more traditional, commercial magazines. With *Egoïste*, they had total freedom. I felt a bit like a free zone, because when Helmut couldn't publish something in *Vogue*, he'd come and do it with me. He enjoyed showing *Vogue* what great things he could have done for them if they hadn't restrained him. Whatever photographs couldn't appear in more official publications ended up in *Egoïste*. We had a low circulation and no commercial constraints whatsoever. *Egoïste*'s identity was born of that freedom. I just wanted the artists I worked with to be happy, you know. Not to mention that I wasn't paying them much. Later on, I married Philippe Grumbach,[7] and he would always say, 'If you do a magazine with a page for stamp collectors, a page for apple-pie lovers and a page for people interested in politics, then in the end none of the stamp lovers, the cake lovers or the voters will read your magazine'. Doing something that resembles you gives you a real chance to reach out to more people. But I wasn't even aware of that back then. Today, I would never have the nerve I had then. For example, one day, I just called up Helmut Newton, whom I didn't know, to ask him to shoot a picture for me. I had met his wife at the hairdresser's and got his number.

So you made the magazine you would have liked to read.

Yes, in a way. But there were others.

Just like Spielberg when he claimed that he was making the movies he'd like to see. Not that there weren't any good movies at the time. There were actually lots of great movies back then.

When I look at the first issues of *Egoïste*, I don't think they're that great. It's only with the third or fourth issue that it started to look like something. The texts in the first two were insipid.

Did you know the people at Condé Nast?

Not personally. Helmut Newton's wife told him that she had met this nice woman at the hairdresser's who dreamed of working with him. And so I called up Newton and said I had an opportunity to photograph Mick Jagger. He said, 'How much do you pay?' I said, '800 francs',[8] and he replied: 'OK then, it's more than Condé Nast, so I'll do it. Bring him over to my studio on this date.' And, naive as I was, I never even thought of confirming the meeting with Jagger, so I showed up at his door on the given day and nobody answered, of course. I must have called him about 30 times from the phone box down the road, but he wouldn't pick up. I was in tears when on the 35th call, he finally picked up and said, 'You're nuts, we never confirmed that meeting'. I begged him to come down because it was my first ever chance to work with Helmut Newton and if he didn't come, I'd be in disgrace for life. So Jagger, who at the time was with the tall Texan model Jerry Hall, came along and Helmut photographed him. Newton then got me to pick the two pictures I wanted to use, asked me if I wanted to work with his wife, and then went on to sell all the other pictures to *Paris Match*. But it was already so completely extraordinary for me to publish pictures by Helmut Newton that I didn't care. *Egoïste* was unknown back them, so getting two photos by Helmut Newton was great.

That was in 1977?

Yes, the second issue. Those first few issues didn't sell well at all because they were terribly placed in the newsstands, under the sellers' feet. It only started to sell by issue four because we hired people to go out and sell it. Issue four sold out because they did such a good job at Les Halles,[9] even though Edgar Faure[10] was on the cover. We printed 4,000 copies and sold 4,000.

How did you come up with the concept of 'advertorials' that later became the trademark of Egoïste?

The first person who told me I should do it every time was Emanuel Ungaro.[11] I had done an advertorial for him with models in the Jardin du Luxembourg and he encouraged me to persevere in that direction. That's how it started.

And how did you then sell that concept to the advertisers? I guess you thought,

'I printed 4,000 copies of the first issue and 3,000 came back. I stored them in my parents' basement and my mother paid the printer.'

'I just called up Helmut Newton, whom I didn't know, to ask him to shoot for *Egoïste*. I had met his wife at the hairdresser's and got his number.'

'If I want to cover my costs, I'll have to have ads'?
It was the only way to have a magazine that was an original creation from cover to cover. I wanted to create ads that were less commercial and product-centric. It happened gradually as I became more confident making them with every issue and advertisers said they liked them. They quickly understood that it was the right way to be in the magazine, that readers were giving the same attention to the advertising pages as the editorial ones.

So you didn't have a hard time convincing them that it was a good concept?
Not at all! Quite the opposite, in fact. I was lucky enough to work with intelligent and cooperative communication directors who understood that it was a plus to show their brand through the eyes of an outsider. The photographers also understood that the more the magazine was one-of-a-kind, an original creation from A to Z, with nothing distorting it, the more their work was showcased. If you have 150 pages of advertising in a 250-page magazine, and they're the same ads that you see in *Le Point* or *L'Express* or *Vogue*, then what's the point? But all these advertorials are very difficult to make and take up so much time.

Let's talk a bit about the creative direction and image production. Did you present your ideas to the brands or did you have carte blanche?
I've sometimes had carte blanche and sometimes I've told them what I have in mind. Over the years, they have all become friends. This magazine exists thanks to them and we wouldn't have so much freedom if it weren't for them. I am very thankful to have worked with people who've dared to play the game. I am absolutely not cynical about this aspect of *Egoïste*.

What about the photographers?
The photographers do it because they understand that it's part of the magazine's identity. Sure, it's not always what they would prefer to be doing because when they shoot advertising, they are much better paid to do the same kind of work. For me, they shoot an image that can't be used anywhere else, that's only used that one time in the issue. I've only sold images to be used as advertising worldwide a few times, like the Cartier panther. But it's very rare.

That image must have been very hard to shoot.
Yes, because we shot it for real; it wasn't a montage or anything. We started at 6am on a Sunday morning to make sure we wouldn't run into a policeman. I had a very clever assistant at the time who 'forgot' to fill in one line on the shooting authorisation and so we added the fact that we'd be walking around with a panther in the streets of Paris later on. But a panther is low to the ground and hides well behind cars. The photographer Jean Larivière was using remote-controlled equipment and did a great job. Another time with him, we shot a camel in front of the pyramid in the Louvre for Vuitton; we were driving around with a horse box at two in the morning. My husband who was the director of the *Figaro* at the time, came with me and told the police the horse box was full of accessories. They bought it. Crazy times. Most of the crazy things I've done in my life were because I had absolutely no idea that what I was doing wasn't normal. Like having a panther in the street.

Was it innocence?
No, it was insouciance.

When did the advertorials actually start in *Egoïste*?
In the fifth issue. Before that there was traditional advertising. We had Chanel if I remember correctly. Cartier used to pay us in lighters. I remember that my parents had a safe at home that was filled with Cartier lighters. No one owns fancy lighters any more, by the way. I remember an advertorial we did for S.T. Dupont a while ago. The first page was a soldier's hand lighting a dynamite stick with a Dupont lighter. The next spread was a picture of generals signing a peace treaty with Dupont pens and hugging. I really liked this idea of war and peace. I'm not sure it was very commercial, though.

Practically, how did it happen? You would call up the advertiser, they'd give you a number of pages and you'd go ahead and shoot?
Yes, we had a fixed production fee, plus the price of the advertising space.

Many advertisers have remained faithful to the magazine throughout the years, haven't they?
I've always tried to keep them happy. So they have remained faithful.

'If you have 150 pages of advertising in a 250-page magazine, and they're the same ads that you see in *L'Express* or *Vogue*, then what's the point?'

What is your relationship with them today? Do you still have complete creative freedom?
Of course! It would be too awful to think that after 40 years of creative carte blanche, they would start to constrain me. In a way, *Egoïste* has always been based on their benevolence towards someone who has managed to make her story continue for over 40 years with complete artistic honesty and without large investors to back her up. They just knew I wouldn't disappoint them. And they know I always put my whole heart into what I do. Obeying orders is just impossible for me; I can only do what I love. I need to be free and proud of everything I do.

But there are a few traditional ad pages in *Egoïste*, aren't there?
Almost none. Maybe two per issue. I've occasionally accepted one or two to bring in a bit more money just before locking an issue, but it's very rare.

I've read somewhere that some advertisers have asked to buy the image rights from you to run their advertorial as advertising.
It has happened, yes.

And you refused to see the images used in another context?
Well, it depends. I used to think that those images had to stay in *Egoïste*, but nowadays, no image is exclusive anymore. Everyone steals everything and publishes it on Instagram, so it seems pointless to try to keep anything, really. If anyone wants to publish a whole issue of *Egoïste* on Instagram, I can't do anything about it. There are no secrets anymore.

Newton shot a few advertorials for *Egoïste*, didn't he?
Only one or two. Guy Bourdin did a few. Avedon didn't do many. But Ellen von Unwerth and Paolo Roversi did a lot of them.

What about Daniel Jouanneau?
Daniel shot a lot of editorials and advertorials for us. He worked a lot with Chanel; Jacques Helleu[12] used to give him carte blanche for everything. Jacques really was marvellous – cynical, sensitive, kind and intelligent. One time, we made a whole fake magazine together for a Chanel watch. We fake-interviewed the watch, there was a text by Françoise Sagan[13] about time, and even a fashion shoot by Guy Bourdin. But things didn't go very well with Bourdin's agent. I called him up to have the pictures and he said they were not ready. So I called Jacques to inform him that we'd be a bit late and he said: 'Well, that's strange because Guy's agent' – and girlfriend at the time –'just called to say she was coming to show me the pictures.' They were trying to cut me out. I was furious. So I asked Jacques if I could do the meeting with Martine instead of him and he said: 'Yes, that'll be utterly amusing.' You should have seen Martine's face when she walked into Jacques' office and found me sitting behind the desk! That was Jacques – he was amazing.

So you were basically functioning like an advertising agency?
No, no. I only did it once for Chanel. They only printed 2,000 or 3,000 and it became a beautiful collector's item, so it was worth it – but time-consuming! I would happily do it again in the right circumstances!

What about Paolo Roversi?
I love him! We've done so much great work together. He's a poet. I get along with him very well because he is extremely literate. He studied cinema,[14] think; he's very cultured and nice to hang out with. He somehow reminds me of Marcello Mastroianni in the way that he is very detached. He doesn't give a damn; he is not ambitious. He is very professional, but also a wonderful human being and a faithful friend. He has an exquisite detachment that feels good in an industry where everyone thinks so highly of themselves and takes themselves so seriously.

When and how did you meet Richard Avedon?
In 1985. We were already quite established; we had been around for eight years. Just as Helmut was the first real game changer for the magazine and opened so many doors for me, so Richard Avedon helped make *Egoïste* an institution and helped turn it into a reference. We got him thanks to my extreme perseverance; I wrote to him for six or seven years. At the time, I was the French correspondent for *Vanity Fair* and I met him in Paris as he was there for the collections. As I arrived in the studio, he had just argued with the *Vogue* team and was looking for a car to drive him back to his hotel. I took the

'We photographed a camel in front of the pyramid in the Louvre for Vuitton; we were driving around with it in a horse box at two in the morning.'

opportunity to ask him for an interview, but he said he hated them, because 'the written thing is not the spoken thing'. 'But,' he added, 'I love *Egoïste* and buy it every month at the airport.' I realized that he was thinking of the wrong magazine. Then he jumped out the car and left me there. That night, I was having dinner with Helmut Newton and his wife June, and I told them about my massive fail. They said they were having dinner with Avedon the following week and would put in a good word for me. It turned out that he thought I was part of Condé Nast because I was the *Vanity Fair* correspondent. While I was thinking that might help me, it was actually what was driving him away because he hated everyone who worked there. June explained to him that I had been doing this magazine on my own for years and he liked that idea. Then Helmut taunted him by saying that nobody knew him in Europe and that Helmut was the real star over here. The next day, I had a phone call at seven in the morning and it was Avedon. He told me that he would send me the first pictures of his story on the 'American West' for *Egoïste* and that he was OK for an interview. I said, petrified, that I would send someone, but he said, no, it had to be me. So we did the interview at the Hôtel Montalembert. When I sent it to him a month later, he loved it, and we became extremely close. There is a lot of humour in Avedon's work, but it also had strong political messages. He also explored mental illnesses, the thin line between beauty and madness, isolation, and so on. He was an intellectual as much as a visual artist. He was one of the most interesting, intelligent and articulate people I have ever met. He was absolutely driven by a strong desire for social and political justice.

What about Helmut?
Helmut was much more frivolous. He was a dandy. He would always pretend to be humble and say that what he was doing was a game. They were both beautiful, both only children, spoiled boys, adored by their mothers.

It felt like Helmut's relationship to Judaism was far less strong than Avedon's.
Well, no. Helmut felt extremely Jewish. He spoke about it less, it's true, but he felt strongly Jewish, deep down.

Does *Egoïste* work the same way today?
Yes, except it's easier today than it was at the beginning. It has become a huge, well-known machine that people like.

Tell me about the art direction of the magazine.
Well, I supervise it, but I am lucky to have worked on it with the best possible people throughout the years. First, there was Philippe Morillon who worked with me for years, up until about 15 years ago.[15] Now, Éléonore Thérond, the daughter of Roger Thérond,[16] works with me. They've been essential because I know nothing about the technical side of things. Philippe came up with the original layout; he did a great job. And now, I get along so well with Éléonore; she was educated by her father who had an incredible eye and great taste. She is wonderful and so gifted.

The idea of an unbound magazine was there from the very start?
Yes. I didn't want the pages to tear and I also didn't want to ruin the double-spread photographs. When we started to have lots of advertorials and the magazine got bigger, I still didn't want to bind it, so I did it in two volumes, like the Bible.

Was black and white an economic or aesthetic choice?
A bit of both. Nowadays, whenever I shoot in colour, I always want to turn everything black and white. Colours are OK when you are Guy Bourdin or Bettina Rheims, who I've worked with since the beginning – both are absolute geniuses when it comes to using colours – but portraits are always much more stunning in black and white.

'Cartier used to pay us in lighters. I remember that my parents had a safe at home that was filled with those Cartier lighters.'

Tell me about the writers. You don't work with journalists but with writers, as Sagan advised you to do.
Yes. And just like the photographers, they've all become friends. Once again, I always try to match people with subjects they find interesting. That's how I work. I'm a kind of obsessive midwife.

And how come you never thought of doing an *Egoïste* book, or an anthology of the best bits?
I will one day. I have amazing archives, that's for sure. It could even be an incredible exhibition. For the 10th issue, the Museum of Modern Art wanted to do an exhibition, but it felt too early at the time. Today, I have more stuff to show. But looking back on the past prevents you from moving forward, I think. Retrospectives are for dead people.

Tell me about your rapport with images.
The first pictures that ever moved me deeply, I remember, were from a book that my parents had called *The Rise and Fall of Nazism*. I looked at it one night when I was 12 and stumbled across pictures of mass graves. It was the first time I was confronted with images that upset me so much that they kept me up for nights afterwards. I think that, later on, publishing the pictures I've published is linked to that. I'm so moved in front of some photographs, much more than paintings. Some painters have amazed me, of course, but nothing compared to what photography does to me. There is something about the reality of it, the fact that we are facing humanity in a much more present way. Seeing a photograph of a beggar is not the same as looking at a Goya painting of one. The photograph puts me in front of a social reality that feels more real, is far worse and touches me more intensely. Cartier-Bresson used to say that photographers are obsessed by the idea that things can disappear. I have always had quite a pessimistic personality, like that line, 'When I see a swimmer, I see a drowned person'.[17] The idea that things can disappear is frightening and I love to be able to photograph them, even just in my head, to make them last forever. Even if, nowadays, the photographic language has become less reliable because of Photoshop – you can fake anything – I am still receptive to images. Because they have a real power on your imagination. There is something very exciting about making an image. Starting off with the same ingredients as everyone else, you are able to make something absolutely unique that will make people *feel* something. I love to make people laugh and dream.

1. When adjusted for inflation, 8,000 French francs is the equivalent of €4,623.

2. Pablo Picasso died on April 8, 1973, without leaving a will. After a legal battle, the courts decided that his estate would be divided between five heirs: Maya Picasso (his daughter with Marie-Thérèse Walter), Claude Picasso and Paloma Picasso (his two children with Françoise Gilot), and Bernard Picasso and Marina Picasso (his two grandchildren by his son Paulo, who himself died in 1975). Before the estate could be divided, however, an inventory of the painter's estate and its estimated value was needed. This four-year process was finished in 1977 and a final figure set at 1.4 billion French francs or €809 million (inflation adjusted to 2018 rates). To settle the inheritance tax of 290 million francs (€167 million at 2018 rates) due on the estate, the heirs gave the French state the choice of a large number of paintings and other works. This collection became the basis for the Musée Picasso, which opened in 1985 in Paris.

3. Francine Crescent edited *Vogue Paris* from 1961 to 1984; she died in 2004.

4. Maurice Rheims was a French art historian and high-profile art auctioneer; he was appointed to value the Picasso estate in 1973.

5. The finished *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, painted in June and July 1907, is generally considered the foundation of Cubism. In 1937, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, bought the painting for $24,000, which in 2018 inflation-adjusted dollars is just $420,000.

6. The 'Zervos' is *Pablo Picasso par Christian Zervos*, an extensive catalogue of Picasso's work created by critic and publisher Christian Zervos, mainly in collaboration with the artist, between 1932 and 1978. Original editions of the 33 volumes sell for over $200,000, but a facsimile version, published by Cahiers d'art and weighing 130kg, is now available for $25,000.

7. Philippe Grumbach (1924-2003) was a French journalist. He began working at weekly news magazine *L'Express* in 1954, eventually becoming its director in 1971.

8. The equivalent when inflation adjusted of €462.

9. From the 12th century until 1971, Les Halles was home to Paris's main fresh-food market. The needless destruction between 1971 and 1973 of the soaring cast-iron-frame buildings that housed the market – designed by Victor Baltard in the 1850s – remains one of the most regretted errors of French post-war urban planning.

10. Edgar Faure (1908-1988) was a French lawyer, politician and statesman. Called to the bar aged just 21, he married in 1931, spent his month-long honeymoon in the Soviet Union, and when war broke out, joined the resistance and then the Free French forces in North Africa. After the war, he was a member of the French legal team at the Nuremberg trials of Nazi leaders and served in a number of high-profile roles in a succession of French governments until the late 1970s.

11. Born in 1933, Emanuel Ungaro is a French designer who trained with Balenciaga and at Courrèges before setting up his own label in 1965. It was bought by Ferragamo in 1996 and Ungaro retired in 2004.

12. Jacques Helleu began his career at Chanel aged 18 and stayed at the house for 40 years. He became artistic director for perfumes and watches, producing the house's first perfume advertisement. He also designed some of the label's most celebrated watches.

13. French novelist Françoise Sagan (1935-2004) became an overnight success in 1954 with her best-selling novel *Bonjour tristesse*, published when she was only 18. The 'charming little monster', as she was described by French writer François Mauriac, would continue to write, but towards the end of her life, became better known for her legal and judicial problems than her literary output. Six years before her death, she wrote her own epitaph: 'Sagan, Françoise. Made her first appearance in 1954 with a short novel, *Bonjour tristesse*, which created a worldwide scandal. Her death, after a life and a body of work both pleasant and botched, was a scandal to no one but herself.'

14. Paolo Roversi studied at the University of Bologna in the late 1960s. He was taught by Umberto Eco who, according to a 2008 article in *Le Monde*, 'gave his classes on the lawn, talking about comic books, Leonardo da Vinci, poetry and cinema'.

15. Philippe Morillon was at *Egoïste* from 1977 until 2001.

16. Roger Thérond (1924-2001) was a French journalist and editor who worked at French magazine *Paris Match* for 50 years, and was twice its editor in chief. He built strong relationships with a wide range of celebrated photographers, including Henri Cartier-Bresson, and was known as '*l'Œil*' or 'the Eye'.

17. The line quoted by Wisniak comes from *Quai des Brumes*, a 1927 novel by Pierre Mac Orlan. In the 1938 film version, which was directed by Marcel Carné from a screenplay by Jacques Prévert, the actual line, spoken by a painter played by Robert Le Vigan, is: 'Je peins malgré moi les choses cachées derrière les choses. Quand je peins un nageur, je vois un noyé' ('I paint in spite of myself the things hidden behind things. When I paint a swimmer, I see a drowned man').

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The Fashion Hysteria Questionnaire: Alexa Chung

By Loïc Prigent

What are your three favourite lies?
'It's delicious!' 'I love you, too.' 'Don't worry, he'll come running back.'

What does the Alexa Chung woman really want?
We're hopefully on the same page, in which case, she wants clothes that make her feel understood and seen. She wants something timeless and timely.

What's the newest thing in your wardrobe that you adore?
I bought a shirt in Hollywood in this vintage T-shirt shop that was next to a coffee shop. I'm addicted to flat white coffees, you see. Anyway, this shirt has a collage of famous people from the 1950s on it, like Marilyn Monroe, and it's screen-printed in brown and white. It sounds gross when I describe it and I suppose it kind of is – and that's why I love it.

When is the last time you screamed for fashion?
Screamed? I burned a hole with a wayward cigarette in the skirt of an Erdem dress that I had borrowed, at (ironically) the Chiltern Firehouse and I screamed. Actually, I have a very low voice and I haven't been able to scream since I was small, so it's matured into more of a yell. It's more of a 'arghahahhhhhhhhhggghhhh!'

Which designer can put you in a state of hysteria?
That's too much. Nothing would make me hysterical, but I do really adore Mrs. Prada.

What is the too-much that is not enough?
Karaoke.

What is your favourite maximalist fashion moment?
I was there when Chanel wheeled an iceberg in as the backdrop for the show; that was fairly spectacular.

What is your favourite fashion joke?
I just Googled 'fashion jokes' and the results were dire, which makes me think there is no such thing as a fashion joke – and that's funny.

How do you transform a boring dinner into a legendary fashion party?
Instigate a game of musical chairs.

Do you design better when drunk or hungover?
Probably hungover because the maximum I can do is respond instinctively.

Can you define the perfect sunglasses?
I like the ones Scott Walker wore.

What do you tell your team so they'll work two more sleepless nights before the show?
I actually ask them to calm me down, not the other way around.

How can unsexy fashion become sexy?
Everything has the potential to be sexy, it just depends what you're into...

Photograph by Angelo Pennetta

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